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EDITED BY LEONARD CUTTS

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TO STUDY ART

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# TEACH YOURSELF TO STUDY ART

By

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## PREFACE

ONE chapter (VIII) is of a purely factual character, and has been included primarily for those who know but little of the actual history of European art. It offers a very brief summary of what has been done in the Western world since the beginning of the Christian era. Many readers will no doubt find that so brief a summary is unsatisfactory. It is hoped, however, that it may stimulate them to further enquiry, and a short bibliography has been included at the end to facilitate this. The other chapters are of a rather more speculative character, and it is hoped that they will prove of interest not only to those who approach the subject for the first time, but also to those who already know something of the story of art. The book is dedicated to both classes of reader, and especially to the great mass of people who are not experts, but who have at one time or another been inspired by a work of art, and seek for further information as to the how and the wherefore.

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D. TALBOT RICE.



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## CHAPTER I

### WHY HAVE PICTURES BEEN PAINTED?

SOME of the earliest evidence we have as to the existence of man on this earth is furnished by the art which he produced, for almost as soon as he was able to fashion flint implements for his use and protection, man had also begun to execute paintings and sculptures. Many of these are of extremely high quality, and of surprising competence, with a fully developed feeling for naturalistic representation. The subjects depicted are nearly always animals, and it is astonishing not only how true to life, but also how powerful and expressive some of these animals are. Quite a number of different kinds are shown, the repertory of course being drawn from those known at the time. Human figures sometimes appear, especially in sculpture, but they are much rarer than the animals and also on the whole much less well done. The tremendous vigour and energy of this art is shown by the picture of a charging bison from Altamira in the north of Spain (Pl. 1); every muscle is taut, every line and touch significant, and one feels that the artist was both a very keen observer of nature and also a very great interpreter of the living model. With a few deft touches he has not only shown us what the bison looked like; he has also conveyed the power of its muscles, the force of its charge, and the whole spirit of its being. It is a work of great expression and beauty, which has seldom been surpassed in the whole history of art in this matter of rendering the spirit of the subject. Indeed, the only criticism that can be levelled against this art is that like practically all the paintings and sculptures of the Palæolithic age, it is concerned with a single animal; the idea of grouping several animals together, of making a composition, was unknown, and though a number of figures often appear on the same wall or roof, they are all individual figures

and have no connection one with another. Thus at Altamira, which is one of the most important sites where these lovely paintings are to be found, there is a great mass of animals on the roof of a cavern, but they are not connected in design, and sometimes one even to some extent overlies another. They are like the casual sketches in an artist's notebook, done as an exercise. It would seem that primitive man, though he could observe and reproduce, was not able at first to put ideas together to produce a story or a sequence of events.

[One of the most curious features about these paintings of the Palæolithic age is that all of them that survive are hidden in the inner recesses of deep caverns, where daylight can never have penetrated. It is possible that other paintings which have long since perished once existed in more accessible places, where they would have been visible by light of day, and could have been admired by any who wished to see them, but in the course of twenty thousand years every trace has disappeared. Even if they did exist, however, the question still remains, why were so many elaborate paintings executed on the walls and roofs of almost inaccessible caverns, where they must have been wellnigh invisible even when they were painted? We do not know much about primitive lighting, but it certainly cannot have been nearly as effective as the electric torches or acetylene lamps which are used to show them up today. One of the chief problems regarding these pictures indeed is, why were they painted?

Some of them, without doubt, had a magical significance. They were executed like the figures familiar in records of mediæval witchcraft, in order to give the medicine man or hunter power over the animals by means of sympathetic magic. Needles were stuck into mediæval figures in order to bring about the sickness or death of the persons they represented, after the appropriate incantations had been recited. Similarly, by means of spells and ceremonies, the primitive medicine man sought to gain power over the animals he depicted. Many of the animals are thus shown in the agony of



death, while others are actually being pierced by spears or arrows. There can be little doubt but that such paintings were executed primarily for magical purposes, and this helps to explain their situation in dark caverns, which no doubt served as shrines or sanctuaries where magical rites were enacted.

Other paintings, it has been suggested, were ritualistic or totemistic. It is very usual in primitive societies to find that a particular group of peoples believes that it has something in common with a particular animal; one tribe thus emulates the swiftness of the deer and adopts this animal as its totem; another seeks the strength of the lion, and so on. Drawings or other representations of their totem animal were executed by these peoples in order to obtain the approval of the animal; by depicting them the artist, and his tribe with him, entered into particular sympathy with the animal. Examples of this belief can be cited among numerous groups of primitive peoples, and it is probable that it existed in Palæolithic times also. This hypothesis again serves to explain the existence of a good many of the paintings.

Even so, however, neither of these explanations seem adequate to account for all the figures, for on the one hand a great many of the animals are shown alive, unassociated with arrows or other signs of attack which might imply a magical connotation, while on the other the animals are often so numerous and of so heterogeneous a character that it hardly seems possible that they could all have been totemic in character. Indeed, a large proportion of them seem to have no particular significance, and many of the pictures would seem to have been executed with no other aim than that of depicting the animals as they were in life, in various attitudes and situations. It is tempting to suggest that they were executed because of an inward urge in the artist himself, or for the sheer fun and enjoyment of the people who did them or saw them. If this is so, these paintings constitute the first purely æsthetic activities of man in this world.

Whatever the reasons, however, the fact remains that these early paintings are both extremely effective and extremely impressive pieces of work. The bison at Altamira is not only intensely realistic in a visual sense, but somehow seems at the same time to express all that appertains to the bison. Its tremendous neck muscles, its delicate hooves, its small crafty eye, are all rendered with amazing expression and bear witness to the very keen powers of observation of which the artists were capable. Seldom have animals been more clearly observed or more accurately and expertly recorded, and the artists, even if they were in the first instance medicine men, must also have taken an intense interest and delight in their work for its own sake. And the observer too must have delighted in looking at these paintings, and however prone we may be in this age of reason to seek explanations for the existence of art in material or practical spheres, we must not forget that the element of delight has always been a very important one in the appreciation of a work of art.

I too will something make,  
And joy in the making ;

wrote Robert Bridges. And if the artist's work causes joy to him, surely one of the chief properties of what he makes should be to give joy to those who look at it.

At the very earliest stages of man's history, then, paintings and sculptures of great skill were being produced, and some of them do not seem to have had any primarily utilitarian character or ulterior aim. They were, it would seem, executed primarily because of the delight taken in their production. The artists who did them were creators just as much as Michelangelo was a creator when he worked for Pope Julius II in the decoration of the Sistine Chapel. Even if the paintings that survive today are to be found in dark caverns, one feels that similar paintings must have existed in lighted and more accessible places, where they could be admired and appreciated easily by a larger body of people than the priests or medicine men who

had access to the dark caverns and who understood any esoteric significance that the paintings may have had.

From the day that these first essays in painting were produced, some 20,000 or more years ago, the production of works of art by man has continued, though the character and nature of the works has varied very considerably. Sometimes the general run of work has been high; sometimes it has been low. Sometimes works have been on a large scale; sometimes only on a very small one. Sometimes the art has been essentially representational; sometimes it has been stylized and abstract. But in one form or another, and in association with practically every type of society, art has existed, and it is quite wrong to describe what are called the Dark Ages—and there were dark ages before the Christian era began as well as during the first millennium A.D.—as of no importance to the student of art. These ages may have been barbarous and the art that was produced during them may have been poor in comparison with that of the great phases, but even at the moments when man's culture was at its lowest ebb, at least a few products which can be counted as works of art were executed, even if they were few in number in comparison to what was done in the more prosperous periods of man's history. But as we look back through the past, it is a significant fact that the ages which we most admire are those which have left the most extensive artistic legacy. Art, it has been said, is the mirror of its age, and the best art on the whole belongs to the greatest ages.

A very long period of actual time succeeded those phases of the Palæolithic age at which the greatest paintings were produced. Throughout this long period a good deal of figural work was done, though much of it was of poor quality in comparison with that which we can see for instance at Altamira in northern Spain or Lascaux in southern France. It would seem that art which was mainly concerned with the depiction of animals was associated with several separate phases of the old Stone Age culture, for we know of similar,

though less good, paintings from prehistoric Africa, and even in comparatively recent times primitive tribes like the Bushmen boasted of a somewhat similar art where animals or lively hunting scenes were to the fore. In these hunting scenes the Bushmen had mastered the problems of narrative and composition, for the figures, which include men, are shown in association one with another, so that they represent scenes or tell a story. But they are less effective and less skilful than those of Palæolithic times; they are like the drawings of children in comparison.

In spite of the fact that there seems to be some sort of stylistic relationship between the Palæolithic and these more recent phases of primitive art, long periods of the world's history knew nothing of this naturalistic art, where the accurate representation of animals constituted the main subject matter. Thus through the whole phase which we know as the Neolithic, or New Stone Age, art was of a more restricted and more utilitarian character. It was, indeed, confined to the decoration of utilitarian objects such as pieces of jewellery, pottery or textiles, and its motifs were formal and rhythmic, with little interest being shown in nature or realism. In fact, if one adopted the parlance of today, practically the whole output of the Neolithic period would be classed as "craft" rather than "art", for the objects on which the art was done were primarily utilitarian in character.

This arbitrary distinction between "arts" and "crafts" is, however, a most unreliable one. It is true that many of the small-scale products of the present day are not works of art, but this does not imply that the true artistic spirit, the incitement to create, is not capable of manifesting itself on a small scale or in association with a primarily utilitarian object, just as well as on a large one, or on something which is not practically useful. Benvenuto Cellini was primarily a jeweller, and his most famous works are salt cellars, but he certainly considered himself an artist, and few would wish to dispute his claims, even if they do not greatly

admire what he produced. And no serious person would insist that a great Persian or Byzantine silk or one of the finer pieces of Persian or Chinese pottery should not be classed as works of art of the very highest quality.

Nevertheless, scale is of importance, and during the Neolithic period the art that man produced was all of very small size. Large sculptures or paintings like those



FIG. 1.—Pot from Susa, Persia. c. 2000 B.C.

of Altamira were unknown, and artistic decoration was confined in the main to the adornment of pottery and perhaps also of textiles, though no examples of the latter have survived. Yet in its own way this decoration was often quite powerful in its effect. A pot from Susa, in Persia, dating from about 2000 B.C. may be cited as an example (Fig. 1). The main motif of its decoration is the representation of a ram, highly stylized, the body taking the form almost of two triangles tip to tip, and the horns curling around like a great circle; the most

naturalistic thing about it is probably the funny little tail. But, stylized though it is, the ornament has great power and movement ; its sweeping rhythm is peculiarly effective, and when once seen it is not easily forgotten. It is, in fact, in its own way, a true work of art, though quite obviously this is a very different type of art from that represented by the Altamira bison (Pl. 1). There the artist's aim was to make the animal as life-like as possible ; here he is concerned with producing a rhythmical pattern which is effective and stimulating in itself, quite regardless of its resemblance to nature. The fact that it happens to be based on a ram is not really significant, for the ram was the starting-point of an imaginative idea conceived in the artist's mind ; it was not the model which excited and inspired him to reproduce its form or express its spirit, so much as the abstract pattern which was suggested to his mind. Just as an organist when extemporizing may start with a well-known theme, such as a hymn tune, but soon leave it for new ideas, so the decorator of the Susa pot started with a sheep. But he soon left it, for other and quite independent themes were developing in his mind, and it was these that he wished to employ in the creation of his work of art.

A very great deal of art of this semi-abstract type was produced in the Neolithic and the early Bronze ages. Sometimes indeed it was even more stylized than in the case of the vessel from Susa, so that nothing more than spirals or similar geometric forms were used. The decoration on some rocks at New Grange in Ireland may be cited (Fig. 6, p. 85). No living model was employed for such work, even in its most stylized form. Nearly all the pottery of these ages bears decoration of a sort, and there is very little that was too poor or too unambitious to be adorned in some way. In studying it, two questions occur to one's mind : why were these pots decorated at all, and why did the men who decorated them choose ornamentation of this particular sort ?

The second question gives rise to many complicated problems and these will be dealt with more fully in

Chapter V. The first may be answered here. As in the case of the Palæolithic paintings, the reasons for the inclusion of a decoration were no doubt manifold. Some of the pottery was thus primarily ritualistic, being intended either for ceremonial use or for burial with the dead, and the ornament upon the vessels was thus either connected in some way with life in the after-world or with the burial ceremony, or with some magico-religious belief. Other forms of ornament, again, would seem to have been applied primarily through conservatism, because vessels had been decorated in that way before. It is quite astonishing how devotedly the human mind adheres to what it is used to, even if some original meaning or purpose has long been forgotten. Thus in the earliest and most primitive forms of pottery a clay band was wound round and round in an increasing spiral till the pot was formed, the junction between the bands being only roughly smoothed over. When pots came to be made on a wheel, with greater competence, the spiral ornament was sometimes retained, though there was no need for it, purely because people had got used to it and liked it. Or again pots were sometimes slung in a string or net covering for carrying, but even when this was dispensed with, a depiction of the string was painted or impressed on the surface, and retained as a decoration. There are numerous patterns and decorations which are to be explained in this way, though it is sometimes necessary to know a good deal about the history of design and pattern before their true origin can be discerned.

But by no means all the ornament on early pottery was of this formal, conservative kind, and by no means all the pots on which more elaborate paintings are to be found were intended to be placed in the graves or used for ritualistic purposes. As often as not the best decorations were executed upon the pots intended for everyday use, and assumed a character not to be explained by conservatism. They were placed there partly because the potter took pleasure in decorating his work and partly because those who used the pots thought that

it made them just that much nicer. In fact, just as in Palæolithic times, the artists added the decorations partly to fulfil an urge in themselves, and partly to please the people who would use the pots. Delight in the seeing and delight in the making, in fact, must have been the primary causes for including a decoration on the majority of pieces of Neolithic and Bronze Age pottery—and when the decoration was well done, as in the case of our pot from Susa, the result was certainly a work of art, even if it was small in size and on a minor rather than a major scale.

As time went on, other external reasons that serve to account for the production of works of art began to play a more important role. The most influential of these was probably that of patronage. The patron has always been important; indeed today, when the old established systems of patronage are breaking down owing to the change in social conditions and a new distribution of wealth, the artist is beginning to find himself in something of a dilemma. But in the great empires of the ancient world, in Egypt, Mesopotamia and Crete for instance, patronage exercised a particularly essential role, and had it not been for the patronage of the ruler or the religious hierarchy, a great deal of the art that we know best from these countries could never have been produced at all. This is especially true of Egypt, where probably as much as some ninety per cent of the art was of a purely official character, and was concerned with telling the tale of the exploits of a monarch or recounting the ritual of a religious or funeral ceremony. Nearly all the tomb paintings and temple reliefs are of this character, and when once one of them has been seen the rest would seem tedious enough, were it not for the first-class craftsmanship of their creators. Moreover, good models were used over long periods, and even if the executants themselves had but little creative ability, the excellence of the original design helped to redeem the monotony. Many of the statues, again, though undoubtedly imposing, are somewhat arid and dull, if once we forget the effect that size, mass and mystery



produce, as opposed to that inspired by true artistic quality.

Yet there are other works from Egypt which would have to be accorded a very prominent place indeed in a museum of the world's best art. The forceful, majestic head usually believed to be that of King Amemenhat IV (1801-1792 B.C.) formerly in the MacGregor Collection (Pl. 2 (a)), for example, or the more delicate, more effeminate, indeed rather decadent head of Nefer.iti at Berlin (about 1360 B.C.) may serve as examples (Pl. 2 (b)). They are things of rare quality and have in them all that betokens true creative art. The men who made them cannot but have taken the greatest joy and pride in their work. But still they remained closely bound by the fetters of patronage. The portrait was primarily intended to glorify the king or queen, or the temple relief to serve the faith, rather than to give pleasure to those who saw it. The artist may have taken joy in his work, but his outward aim could hardly have been to give delight to others, and his own personality was often suppressed and obliterated, so that today we remember the patrons, while the artists' names have long been forgotten - if, indeed, they were ever known.

So far as names and personalities are concerned, indeed, the patron remains the principal figure in the ancient East; only with the development of democratic civilization in Greece do the names of the artists begin to appear in the place of those who paid for or commissioned the works. Thus we connect the Parthenon with the name of its architects, Ictinus and Callicrates, and its sculptor, Phideas, rather than with any individual patron, even if one man can hardly have executed alone all the vast mass of sculpture that adorns it. With this new interest in the individuality of the artist, the scope for personal expression was greatly extended. The glorification of the ruler or the religious hierarchy ceased to be a prerequisite of art, and the artist was able to create with the dual objective of satisfying his own urge and of pleasing a great mass of people.

This condition survived until Roman imperialism

once more substituted the supremacy of the patron, and with it the anonymity of the artist, and more than a thousand years were to pass before artists once again began to be known in and for themselves. In the intervening centuries the personality of the artist was suppressed, not in this case because of the pride of a patron, but because the artist was willing to submerge his own identity in the service of an all-embracing religious faith. There is indeed an important difference between the suppression of personality at the dictates of an autocratic ruler, and its subservience to a guiding religion in which the artist himself believes and which he regards it as an honour and a privilege to serve. And if he was guided by such principles as these, there was often a further overt aim, that of instructing those who looked at the finished work. In the early Christian Church many of those who attended the services were not able to read, and so the Bible story was set out for them upon the walls of the building, so that they could follow it and learn for themselves the sequence anyhow of the major events. Mediæval glass has sometimes been described as the poor man's Bible and in the East Christian world frescoes or mosaics served the same instructional and narrative purpose.

Christian artists, and probably also Buddhist artists in the East, were very happily placed in this way, for their task was to explain and express something in which they themselves fervently believed. The best art inevitably has something of the divine about it, and when the avowed object was to give expression to the divine, it is not surprising that great results came about. There are those who would assert that this suppression of self in the cause of a guiding faith was capable of inspiring greater art than that where the factor of personality and individuality obtruded. This may or may not be so. But the fact remains that the work produced in the Byzantine world or in the Romanesque West, by artists whose names have not survived because they were willing to sink their own individuality for the greater glory of the Faith they served, is in no way

inferior in quality to that which was doped over the signatures of the men whom we have come to revere as outstandingly great in Italy or the Netherlands, France or Spain. Some of it is perhaps austere; some of it may be in an idiom which is strange to us. We may in some cases have, as it were, to learn a new language. But when we have learnt it we will realize that much of the work is of great significance. Its idiom is nowhere better expressed than in the great mosaic of Christ the Almighty, which dominates from the centre of its dome the little church of Daphni near Athens (Pl. 3). This strangely awesome yet strangely tender figure is not perhaps the conception of Christ that we know; but it has the spirit of the divine about it to a degree hardly equalled in any other of the many thousands of pictures of this subject that have been painted since Christianity became a world religion.

Though many of the painters of the Renaissance, like Fra Angelico in Italy or Memlinc in the Netherlands, were very sincere Christians, and produced great work in the service of the faith, others were admittedly almost pagan in outlook. Yet their work was no less great from the artistic point of view, even if it was less Christian. They had, these men, a new faith, a faith in their art, and they believed, believed most intensely, that that creed and their own urge to create was enough. In their case it certainly was enough, because of the intensity of their belief. But subsequently, in the case of lesser men, it has hardly been sufficient, and one sometimes senses the lack of a guiding faith among the products of the minor figures. Such is the case, for instance, with many of the nineteenth-century painters in England or Germany. Their art, though superficially an idealistic and often also a Christian art, tends to lack profundity just because the artists lacked intensity of faith either in the Christian Church, like the Byzantines, or in the power for good of their own art or their own age, like the great individuals of the Italian Renaissance. And in more recent times, when old ideas have been destroyed and old beliefs dislodged,

the artist has been left hovering, uncertain where to turn. It is for that reason that so much of the art of today seems formless and lacking in objective. And when the artist turns to pure materialism, as the Communists would have him turn, results have been even less successful, for art has something of the divine about it, and refuses to submit to mechanical rules.

But these are problems which will be examined as we proceed. Here it is our object to answer a definite and clear question : why have pictures been painted ? Various reasons have been proposed, and these and many others have some degree of truth in them. Art has thus sometimes had the aim of helping the medicine man in his work. It has sometimes been produced at the behest of an all-powerful ruler. It has sometimes been inspired by a religious hierarchy. It has sometimes sought to satisfy a large body of admirers. It has sometimes been the outcome of a personal faith. But whatever has been the initial cause, the anchor, as it were, to which it was attached, there has, in great art, always been something more, which may best be defined as the power of creation. The true artist does not merely copy nature, he gives expression to its forms and creates something new in the process. The bison from Altamira, the head of Amemhat IV, even the ram on the pot from Susa, are all something more than the mere subject—bison, man, ram or whatever it may be ; they are the expression of an idea. In producing each of these visible forms the artist has also gone further ; he has created something new, something that is an entity in itself. In the case of the " Christ " at Daphni this goes perhaps further still, for the artist avowedly set out to give expression to the essence of the divine spirit. He was a great artist and he succeeded where a smaller man, with so ambitious an aim, might have failed. But this picture may serve us here as the keystone of what is art. It is the visible expression of an idea, and the essence of great art lies, not so much in the magnitude of the idea, as in the power of expressing it. Two great French artists, Chardin and Cézanne, often chose as

their subject matter no more than an old saucepan or an onion, yet they painted very great pictures. Certain painters of the nineteenth century chose the theme of the Transfiguration, and produced pictures of complete insignificance. To achieve this power of expression, faith is surely essential, though it may not necessarily be the accepted religious faith of the age. The artist must be able to satisfy himself with a clear conscience. If he does that, and if he is sincere, he will eventually satisfy his public—though it has not always happened that the public he has satisfied has been the public of his own day.

## CHAPTER II

### WHY SHOULD WE LOOK AT PICTURES?

IT is thus clear that works of art of one sort or another have been prized from the very earliest times, and pictures are today everywhere accepted as a normal accompaniment of our life and civilization. It is almost impossible to think of a house without pictures of some sort ; good, bad or indifferent, they are to be found in every room, in public buildings, in schools and in churches. Indeed, they have come to be accepted so much as a matter of course, that people often pass them by day after day, hour after hour, without so much as knowing what they represent. Familiarity has indeed bred contempt ! But even such people would regret their absence and would even probably resent it intensely, were they to be deprived of the right of looking at or of owning pictures. Just as the ability to read is an essential of civilized life today, even if there are many who seldom open a book, so pictures have become a normal accompaniment of our lives, even if we do not always know how to look at them to the best advantage.

There are, in fact, a great many different ways of looking at pictures ; or rather, one may take true pleasure in looking at pictures for a very large number of different reasons. Not all these reasons, however, will necessarily be of an essentially æsthetic character, for it quite often happens that people with little experience of looking at pictures are drawn to them for some quite different reason than that of their intrinsic quality, or they derive an enjoyment which is perfectly sincere from looking at pictures which appear banal or second-rate to the more experienced observer. Thus, for example, people may look at a portrait primarily because they know or are interested in the sitter, rather than because of the quality of the work as a painting,

but they will experience none the less a feeling of emotion which is far more profound than anything that a photograph would convey. Or again, they will be lifted outside themselves and the affairs of everyday by seeing in a shop window a view of a sunset sky or of sheep in the snow which a connoisseur would dismiss as sentimental or second-rate at the first glance.

But as experience grows, the æsthetic side of this business of looking will tend to grow also, and the spectator will probably find that whatever the reason may be that led him to look at pictures in the first instance, such as the interest he felt in the sitter of a portrait, the admiration he gave to a well-known or favourite landscape, the love that he had for some particular theme such as one from the Bible story, he will sooner or later experience an additional emotion, which will succeed for a moment in carrying him away from himself into a new world of enjoyment. It will be an emotion of a non-worldly, supra-normal character, and will succeed in arousing a feeling of excitement and enthusiasm if the picture be one with which his feelings are in tune, irrespective of whether it is a portrait, a landscape, a subject picture, a religious painting, or even an abstract composition. It will, in the end, not really be so much the subject matter of the picture that will interest and attract the spectator, as the way in which it is treated by the artist. The picture itself will become the centre of interest, rather than its subject, and the identity of the sitter, the locality of the landscape, the significance of the scene, will tend to be forgotten in the greater concern of the picture itself—its draughtsmanship, its colour, its composition, and so on. Any true work of art will have something of the divine about it, and it is at basis that spirit that attracts us, and which will, in the end, remain with us as a lasting memory.

The nature of this divine spark is something that varies very considerably both in character and in degree. A modest English water colour by such an artist as Girtin, or a great Venetian altar piece by such a painter

as Titian, are thus very different things. Yet both, and a thousand other types of picture as well, are bound by what may be termed the æsthetic approach of their artists. Each artist has seen in his subject something beyond and outside its mere subject matter ; each has experienced an emotion in the painting of the picture, and each has sought to convey this emotion to the spectator. And as he looks, the appreciative spectator will experience something of the emotion felt and expressed by the artist. •

Sometimes, of course, very great pictures, which have been universally admired by connoisseurs throughout the ages, fail to stimulate even the more susceptible amongst us. The seventeenth-century French painter Poussin is thus by some considered as arid and boring ; Rubens' great canvases seem overwhelming and " altogether too much of a good thing " ; even Raphael may fail to strike a sympathetic chord. Thus on his first visit to the Vatican, Joshua Reynolds found that the Raphaels had no great meaning for him.

I was let into the Capella Sistina in the morning [he writes in his notebook] and remained there the whole day, a great part of which I spent walking up and down it with great self-importance. Passing through on my return the rooms of Raphael, they seemed of an inferior order.

For some unknown reason, painter and spectator may thus at times be out of tune one with another. This is but natural, for tastes vary just as much as people. But provided that the artist is not incompetent or insincere, and that the spectator is reasonably sensitive and unprejudiced, any lack of understanding is not likely to be permanent. Indeed, the spectator will find that his point of contact with painters changes as his character and interests change, and he will not necessarily enjoy at the age of forty the same pictures that he enjoyed at eighteen. He may come to like things of a more complicated character, where the more obvious appeals of resemblance, accurate draughtsmanship or harmonious colouring are absent ; he may come



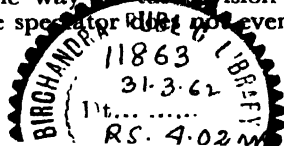
to seek simpler things, where the artist's more straightforward aims are not confused by problems that are primarily psychological; but his tastes are not likely to stand still. Nor, indeed, should they, for tastes that are irremovably founded at an early age are likely to be associated with mental inflexibility and to remain to a greater or lesser extent sterile.

The first and most direct appeal of a picture is likely to depend, in the case of the normal individual, primarily upon the nature of its subject matter, and in the last 250 years or so of the world's history, pictures have usually been described on this basis. We thus automatically divide pictures up into classes such as portraits, landscapes, figure subjects, still lives, religious paintings and so on, and different types of subject have in comparatively recent times been more or less popular at different periods. The popularity of different subjects has, indeed, depended on the main preoccupations of man's outlook in each age. Four hundred years ago, when the Church was profoundly influential, the most normal subjects were religious; two hundred years ago, in the age of individualism, the portrait was supreme; a hundred years or more ago it was the subject picture or the landscape, the one because men loved a story—it was the age of the great novelists—and the other because the average man is more prepared to see beauty in a natural landscape than in any other subject, and his enthusiasm led him from the natural scene to painting. Today abstract paintings, where form, pattern and colour are treated primarily for themselves and where there is little attention paid to representation, have replaced subject pictures and landscapes as the type most characteristic of the times. In this age of materialism the resort to abstraction is perhaps not surprising. These abstract paintings tend to shock the uninitiated, but abstract pictures are really nothing new, and the pattern art of the Celtic world was in its own way just as abstract as one of the products of the “École de Paris” of 1953.

The nature of landscape painting has also varied

very considerably through the centuries. Thus in seventeenth-century Italy artists usually painted idealized landscapes which represented no particular place, but which comprised in one picture a series of popular and familiar subjects, which could not fail to appeal to the tastes of those who were familiar with the idiom. In Holland, on the other hand, the views were straightforwardly taken from nature without any embellishment, and achieved their effect because of the quality of the work, rather than as a result of the impressiveness of the subject matter. In the eighteenth century in this country the subject was admittedly of interest, and many patrons commissioned landscapes in order to have in their possession a view of some particular place or scene to which they were attracted. But on the whole, simplicity of subject matter was a criterion, rather than dignity of theme, and some of the greatest painters, with Constable foremost among them, asserted that it was the picture and not the subject that mattered. The carefully composed, classical type of picture was probably never so popular in this country as the naturalistic, in spite of the enthusiasm for Italy and Italian products which pervaded eighteenth-century taste.

The casual spectator, however, even today, will probably be drawn in the first instance to a landscape because he knows or admires the scene it represents. The appeal of many an eighteenth-century water colour, like one of Turner's views of Durham (Pl. 17), is initially in the subject, and the spectator tends to look at it because he knows and likes the scene. But this is hardly the case with a later Turner, like his famous "Rain, Steam and Speed" in the Tate Gallery, where actual representation has very little part to play. The spectator looks at this because he is attracted by the delicate colour harmonies and the general impression of atmosphere that it gives, rather than because of the subject. Or perhaps he finds something that excites and thrills him in the painter's interpretation of what he sees and in the subtle way he turns his vision into a lyrical poem. Often the spectator does not even know



the place that is depicted in a landscape, which he admires, and such familiarity is certainly not essential to an enjoyment of the picture. The same is the case with Constable, for though he believed himself to be more concerned with the reproduction of nature than with any other problem, he chose in many of his works to paint subjects which depended on the fleeting changes of light and atmosphere rather than on the portrayal of more permanent factors, so that as often as not we can never see the views exactly as he saw them. Indeed, many of his most lovely pictures have as their subjects nothing more than a few scudding clouds and a patch of blue sky, and even in those in which there is a central focus, such as Salisbury Cathedral, the clouds, the rippling water and the light are just as essential as the building.

But even if the more stable factors in a landscape remain permanent—a hill, a house, a church or whatever it may be—it has been said that no two people see them the same way. In the year 1873 two French painters, Pissarro and Cézanne, were working together at Pontoise. They set out in the mornings and set up their easels before the same subjects. One day they both painted the village street from almost the same spot (Pl. 22). Cézanne saw the houses as great masses of cubic form and the street as a problem in geometric composition; Pissarro saw them as scintillating points of light and masses of bright colour. Both had the same scene before them under exactly the same conditions, but each interpreted it in a different way so that the two pictures are hardly recognizable as the same subject. But all the same, each artist created a great picture, and it is essentially a matter of personal taste rather than intrinsic quality as to which one should prefer. All men, praise God, are not the same, and their visions differ. Some may see landscapes as masses of pattern, like Cézanne, others as an analysis of light and colour, like Pissarro. Each painter interprets in his own way; each has something of his own to give, and in the end it is Cézanne or Pissarro. Constable or

Turner, that matter most, and not Pontoise, Salisbury or Durham. Thus though we may start from the view, we end with the picture, and many a person who has, willy nilly, been taken to an exhibition, has begun by liking something because it depicted a subject which he knew and loved, and has passed from that point to loving a picture for itself, because it interpreted the view in a way which seemed to him particularly effective.

The role of the painter may, in fact, be described as akin to that of an interpreter, for he interprets the visual subject in much the same way as a great actor interprets a role in a play. But just because he is a creator as well as an interpreter, he is able to add immeasurably to the subject in making the interpretation. To see a great actor in a play of Shakespeare is a more unforgettable experience than the thrill derived from reading the play for oneself. To see a great painter's rendering of a familiar landscape is to see something more than the landscape itself. By selecting a fragment of it, the painter is able to transform it into a new and living entity on its own. He can, in fact, open up a whole new realm of possibilities and a wealth of delight previously inconceivable, for he brings to bear a new and more perceptive vision than that of the average man.

The layman will probably be drawn to look at the pictures of a landscape initially because he knows and loves the scene. But he will continue to look at them, firstly because they will teach him to see more in actual views than he ever saw before, and secondly because the pictures themselves will afford a new and previously unknown source of delight which, when once realized, will never be forgotten and will be available for the rest of a lifetime. Landscapes, in fact, show us more of the beauty of nature than we are likely to see for ourselves, and they show it in a new and unfamiliar way.

The case with portraits is closely similar, in that the layman is often first drawn to look at one because of the identity of the sitter. It is perhaps an ancestor of whom he is proud, an historical figure in whom he is

interested, or a person unknown to him; to whom he is attracted because of some facial resemblance to a friend or relation. Or it may be that the costume worn by the sitter intrigues him because of its lovely colour or its unusual character. But when once his interest has been stimulated by such external factors, the spectator will begin to find that his attention becomes centred on the picture itself, and he gradually becomes less concerned with the painting as portrait, and more concerned with its qualities as a picture.

There are, of course, vast numbers of hack portraits which have little importance as pictures, for until the invention of the camera the demand for likeness-taking was very widespread, and many of the men who produced them were little more than artisans. But at all periods paintings which are important in themselves have been produced in the realm of portraiture, and some of the world's most interesting portraits are at the same time to be numbered amongst the most outstanding pictures: Velazquez' "Innocent X" in the Doria Pamphili Gallery at Rome (Pl. 14) or Raphael's "Pope Julius II" in the Uffizi at Florence may be included among the number. They are pure portraits, with little more than the face, head and shoulders of the sitters as their subject matter, yet they are tremendous, magnificent, or captivating, they seem somehow to reveal great profundity of character, and above all they have a life of their own, independent of that lived on earth by their sitters, or of the actions that they performed and the fame they left behind them. Such portraits as these serve as proof, if proof be needed, that the dicta of certain modern writers and critics that portraiture is to be classed as a craft rather than an art are so much nonsense. Portraits can be great pictures, and they will be appreciated and acclaimed as such, whatever may have been the reasons that first drew the spectator to take an interest in them. It would be invidious to attempt to name the artists who have produced good portraits which are also great pictures; Raphael and Velazquez, Rembrandt and

Hals, Rubens and Van Dyck, Reynolds and Gainsborough, were all great portraitists and great painters at the same time, and in more recent times one may mention the name of Augustus John. Their works will attract us for different reasons, yet in all of them we may hope to find that spark which marks great art and not mere likeness-taking.

The gap between the portrait proper and what may best be termed the figure study is a narrow one. In the true portrait, the identity of the sitter is always of importance, even if our knowledge of him is incomplete or the name has been lost. If we at times forget him in our admiration of the work of art, he still remains essential. In the figure study, on the other hand, the sitter is there primarily as a model or subject for the artist's talent. He is a type, even a shape, rather than a personality. Renoir once said that he employed a model purely to set him going ; to permit him to dare things he would never dare to do were the model not there. And though this belief was never expressed in so many words by Rembrandt, it was clearly enough the guiding rule of much of his later work. The pictures of this artist are not so much portraits which seek to represent the features and convey an idea of the character of some particular individual whose name and deeds we remember, or at least would wish to know. They are, rather, studies, where the main concern is form and composition, even if character drawing has a part to play. The approach of the artist is here probably closer to that of the still-life painter than to that of the portraitist ; he would regard himself as fulfilling the role of a creator rather than a recorder, and his figures are treated much in the way that the still-life painter would use a few oranges, an apple or a vase as his subject. Indeed in the work of such a painter as Cézanne taken as a whole, still lifes are far more important than portraits, and he is even reported to have said to one of his sitters, "Be like an apple." It was the analysis of form that interested him, rather than the analysis of character, and as a

result his portraits, though superb pictures, do not tend to inspire very much interest in the character of the sitter. His well-known portrait of his wife or that of his cook-general, for instance, are wonderful pieces of composition and show astonishing mastery of formal analysis, but the sitters are not particularly interesting on the grounds of their own personality. In the portrait of his wife, for instance (Pl. 20), the curious stolidity of the figure is expressed with astonishing clarity, and though it is devoid of any superficial charm, the painting is a thing of great beauty. One would, perhaps, hardly be tempted to meet the sitter as a contemporary "lion", but one would prize the picture as a jewel of outstanding price.

If some modern writers have been severe in their strictures on portraiture, regarding it as a sterile sideline of true art, they have been even more sternly critical of subject pictures. This attitude has no doubt to some extent been engendered by the excessive interest in subject for subject's sake which dominated a great deal of nineteenth-century art, when it was often held that if the subject were elaborate and interesting enough, a great picture would inevitably result—granted of course a reasonable degree of competence on the part of the artist. Because of this, a great many pictures were produced between about 1790 and 1890, often of great size, but usually lacking the essentials of true picture making. Composition and colour harmony were thus forgotten, and the story was allowed to obtrude itself to an exaggerated degree, so that the picture became banal as a narrative, or required an extensive literary or verbal comment before it was comprehensible, or if not, became so overcharged with detail that it was impossible to see the wood, that is, the picture, for the trees, that is, the narrative with which it was concerned. This affliction for narrative has often survived in the minds of those who pay little attention to art, and the average layman tends to be more attracted by pictures which have a literary context, like Sir John Millais' (1829-96) "Boyhood of Raleigh"

or W. F. Yeames' (1835-1918) "When did you last see your father?" than by one which is more obviously concerned with matters essentially painterly and less dependent on the theme of the picture. A theme of this sort can so easily become no more than an appeal to sentiment or some similar factor quite foreign to the ideals of true art.

During the last century or so a good many second-class painters had recourse to narrative in order to catch popularity. They produced bad pictures as a result. But that does not necessarily imply that all pictures which tell or illustrate a story are consequently bad from the artistic point of view, as some recent critics have tended to suggest. On the one hand, the desire to stress the appeal of subject matter often did produce bad art; on the other the narrative picture, where the story was unduly relied upon, was a characteristic of the nineteenth century. Much nineteenth-century art was bad, and each age tends to revolt against that which the preceding age produced. But to argue from this that all narrative art lacks the true flame of quality, or that all nineteenth-century art is bad, as do some extremists, is to enter the realm of absurdity. Hogarth, for example, was certainly one of the greatest painters who have ever lived and worked in England, yet most of his best pictures were essentially narrative in character, and in many of them the narrative was developed through four, six or even twelve different panels as a continuous moral story. And practically the whole of Christian art, from the paintings of the Catacombs in Rome to those of Stanley Spencer at Burghclere near Newbury, has been concerned with the illustration or relation of some part of the Bible story, again as often as not in a series of panels which follow one upon the other to complete a continuous narrative. Giotto's frescoes in the Arena Chapel at Padua, the mosaics and wall paintings of the Church of the Saviour of the Chora at Constantinople (Kahrieh Camii), or Michelangelo's Sistine ceiling, afford a few examples amongst many thousands, all of them of outstanding importance.



The layman, then, should not be put off by the writings of critics who deny the appeal of subject, whether in landscape, portrait, or narrative. Subject has its own very particular and very legitimate appeal, and will serve to draw many people to painting who would otherwise take no interest in it at all. But it must be remembered that in painting the subject is primarily a means to an end, and that in art the problem of how a thing is expressed is more important than the question of what it is that is portrayed. Scenes of the very greatest significance, like Our Lord's Crucifixion, may make very poor pictures; portraits of great men like Napoleon may have less æsthetic value than Cézanne's painting of his cook. A seemingly trivial subject, on the other hand, may serve as the theme for a very great picture. A subject which in itself has no message to convey, that is without profound significance or high moral tone, and which has no interest to posterity, may still make a superb painting. One of Degas' studies of a laundress ironing or a ballet girl rehearsing her steps has no external significance, yet all this painter's pictures of these unassuming subjects are of great importance as works of art (Pl. 21).

Different ages have had very different conceptions with regard to this question of subject matter. In the past it has usually been closely associated with the basis of the particular civilization to which the art belonged. In ancient Egypt, for example, art was almost entirely concerned with the exploits of a particular monarch or the ritual of a formalized religious system; in classical Greece, the actions of gods and goddesses, in the form of idealized men and women, constituted the normal subject matter drawn on by the sculptors and painters; in early Christian times it was the story of the Christian faith that was illustrated on panel, wall or carving alike; with the Renaissance it became the fashion to depict scenes of classical mythology just as freely as those of the Christian story; since that time the repertory has gradually become more extended until, with the eighteenth century, all sorts of new subjects began to

appear, religious, historical, moral and so forth. And more recently further themes have been embraced by the painter as within his legitimate field, some of them primarily of a literary character, but others even philosophical or psychological. The paintings of the Surrealists are of the latter character, for they seek to analyse the workings of the inner mind and to depict something of the strange inconsequent vividness that distinguishes the mind pictures of dreamland.

Painters have indeed gone even further and turned to abstract composition, where no recognizable visual form is apparent at all. They are here entering into the realm either of absurdity (if insincere) or of higher mathematics, which is really the sphere of philosophical enquiry. Abstract art has been produced in the past, for pure form has always been a primary concern of the creative artist, even if it has been disguised under a naturalistic cloak, and at various times in the past pattern which was in no way linked to representation has more than once formed the basis of a phase of art. But it is to be questioned whether abstract forms which are to be interpreted as visual analyses of psychological problems should really fall within the sphere of the artist. Yet even the most extreme of these pictures may well awake the curiosity of the layman, and even if he sees nothing in them that attracts him or even if they only awaken emotions of curiosity, they may help him to see in pictures of a more conservative character certain qualities he would never have perceived otherwise.

Pictures then are of numerous kinds, and we are likely to look at them in the first instance for a number of different reasons. It may be our love of a particular landscape or of the countryside in general; it may be an interest in some particular man, or in men who lived in a past age; it may be because we are interested in our religion, and we want to follow the Christian story in art; it may be that we like classical literature, and want to see what the artists were producing when the stories and poems we know and love were being composed. All these, and many others, are reasons

which may first lead us to look at pictures. But they are in reality only preliminary or superficial reasons, and if we go on looking, some other and profounder cause will sooner or later become operative. It is the definition of this cause that affords the real answer to the question "Why should we look at pictures?"

In a word, the reason is that we want to be taken away from ourselves and out of the limits of the everyday world in which we live. The artist, whether he be poet, painter or musician, has the power to transport us, if we will allow him to do so, when we read his books, look at his pictures, or listen to his music with an open mind. Each man will find himself more in sympathy with the works of certain artists than with those of others, for neither all men nor all artists are moved by exactly the same things. But when the sympathy is there, the artist will be able to inspire the spectator, so that for a time at least he forgets himself and all his troubles in the contemplation of the work before him. But it is something more than mere forgetfulness that results, for man's spirit is at the same time recreated. All that is most spiritual in his make-up is aroused and inspired. He is transported into a new world, and when he has once visited it he will inevitably desire frequently to revisit it, and to seek the awakening of the same emotions again. Like all great emotions, those engendered by art are not always happy, and to seek only the oblivion of Nirvana is to ask the impossible. But the emotions will always be on a high plane, above common experience, and outside the run of everyday life. Just as art can awaken emotions which are supra-normal, so in its works something that is supra-real is produced. For art does not imitate, but creates, and a work of art has an independent life of its own whether its subject matter proceeds from the imagination or from the copying of nature. A photograph merely copies. A work of art may or may not resemble nature; the essential is that it should also live, and in this giving of life lies the artist's most outstanding power.

### CHAPTER III

## ART AND PATRONAGE

WHEN looking at works of art, especially those of the past, it is often illuminating as well as interesting to give some consideration to the nature of the patronage under which they were produced, for at certain periods in the world's history, the patron not only paid the artist, but was also virtually a dictator with regard to what was produced.

It is, unfortunately, not possible to say anything as to patronage in Palæolithic times. The tribal medicine man may have exercised some degree of control, but, as suggested above, it is probable that the work was done to a great extent by individuals because they wanted to do it, and they therefore presumably had a free choice as to what they did. Nor would one suppose that any very dictatorial sort of patronage was exercised in Neolithic times, or during the early Bronze Age, when most of the works of art that we know were on a small scale and were produced in answer to a general demand. The patron no doubt made his own selection of the type of pot he wanted, and chose the decoration that most pleased him, but there is reason to believe that the artist or craftsman executed his work without any strict control from outside, other than that exercised by a purchaser selecting from a number of examples when once the works were finished. The nature of the pottery and the types of decoration that are most commonly found on it thus constitute a guide to the general character of the taste of the age in which the artist was working, as well as affording a guide to the nature of the particular society for which the things were made.

\* The case with the arts of the great civilizations of the ancient world in the Nearer East is, however, very different, for in Egypt, Mesopotamia and Persia alike,

art was very strictly controlled, and the artist was essentially the servant either of the religious hierarchy, or of monarchical or similar power, and his activities were almost entirely directed either towards the glorification of a particular individual, or towards the service of a religious creed. The reliefs on the walls of the Ramesseum at Karnak afford especially striking examples of the influence of patronage, for they are concerned almost entirely with the exploits of the monarch who was responsible for the creation of the building, namely Ramesses II; a particularly effective section of the reliefs depicts in narrative form the story of his campaigns against the Hittites of Asia Minor. Similar historical narratives are to be found in a number of other temples, though it was actually with themes of a religious character that the greater number of reliefs in the numerous temples of Egypt were concerned. Kings or noble personages are in these shown taking part in some kind of ritual act in the temple; the monarch, being himself regarded as divine, naturally played a prominent part even in art of a religious as well as in that of a secular character.

Many of the tomb paintings were of similar nature, though they tended to be less restricted, for though they were mainly concerned with the future life, they usually showed, in addition to the conventional funeral ritual and ceremonies, all sorts of vivid details connected with life in this world. Thus the dead man was represented hunting, or taking part in some sort of pastime; he was shown receiving tribute or rents, brought to him by vassals or tenants; he was depicted in the act of supervising his farm or his business. All the things which he did when alive were as often as not included in the tomb paintings, partly as records, but more because it was assumed that he would do and enjoy in the future life exactly the same things that he did and enjoyed on earth.

In all such works the artist not only followed closely set rules, laid down by conservatism, but also had to submit to very exact control on the part of his patron;

indeed, he was not at liberty to digress from this control except in minutiae. The merit of his work lay in his powers of interpreting or giving expression, not so much to the human figures, the appearance of which was laid down by convention, as to those of animals or birds which were frequently included in large numbers. He could, for instance, no doubt vary the numbers and types of water fowl in a hunting scene, though he would not always be permitted to decide how many slaves, camels, cows or other offerings of tribute should be shown, unless he first obtained the approval of the patron. The artists' work really in many cases had to follow the lines of a set and more or less abstract pattern, which he was hardly at liberty to vary. Some wall paintings from the tomb of Ti showing singers and musicians are indeed perhaps more effective as a piece of rhythmical pattern than as the illustrations of a scene, and the figures are all so conventionalized that they not only cease to have any personality, but even seem to have but little actual meaning.

Art on a small scale was extremely important in Egypt, but it was in general even more conventional, than painting and sculpture, and the numerous bronzes of deities or deified animals and the faience images from the tombs known as ushabti figures followed extremely rigid forms. Here the differentiation between mere hack-work and what was of real quality was primarily in the craftsmanship and in the details of execution. In fact, it was really only in the paintings of naturalistic scenes—fishing, the chase and so on—and in the modelling of small doll-like figures for the tombs, where the affairs of worldly existence were depicted in a charmingly vivacious manner, that any degree of freedom was at all possible. But even in such works the control of the patron was severe, and the artist was told exactly what to do, even if he was permitted greater freedom in the way he did it. Probably at no other time in the world's history has the artist been so sternly controlled by his patrons as he was in Egypt.

The artist in Mesopotamia was, on the whole, a good deal more independent. It is true that much of what he did, both in early and in later times, was controlled by conventions little less rigorous than those that pertained in Egypt, and was produced at the command of exclusive patrons, such as the ruler, the priesthood, or a few rich nobles. Without them the artist could hardly have existed; he certainly could not have flourished. But realistic portraiture was anyhow in early times a favourite art form, and some of the small figures in stone produced in Babylonia are personal in a way that was hardly known in Egypt. In fact, the artist was allowed to interpret his subject matter as well as to depict it, and it would seem that he also sought, and was perhaps encouraged, to "interpret" and to express personal ideas and emotions. And though the sculptured reliefs of Assyria are colder and less expressive than the vivid statuettes of Babylonia, they have a clarity of line and a brilliance of execution which recalls the perfect draughtsmanship of such a painter as Ingres. Yet here again the imperial patron was all-powerful; it was he who decreed what was to be done, and the artist was virtually his slave.

It is impossible to pursue here in detail the story of patronage in other civilizations of the ancient world. Suffice it to say that very similar restrictions pertained in Persia, and though the art of Crete or Mycenæ was less rigid in appearance, lacking the monotonous rhythmic aspect of so much of the Egyptian, the artist was still equally dependent on the ruler not only for his livelihood, but also as the arbiter of what he should or should not do. But when once the city-states of Greece, with their democratic rule, began to rise as centres of civilized life, the picture changed completely. Artists ceased to be subservient to the will of an individual and became instead recognized members of society, whose opinions were not only considered, but also revered. Rigid conservatism to old ideas was at the same time rapidly cast aside. Instead of an autocratic ruler or a religious hierarchy, hide-bound by narrow conventions,

acting as sponsors for the erection of a building, the carving of a statue, or the painting of a wall, and as the arbiters of its nature, character and appearance, a commission was entrusted to the artist by a city council. It was the artist's duty, as well as his right, to execute the work according to his own lights, and all the inhabitants of the city had perfect freedom to criticize or comment on his work. Further, the artist was given the task, as often as not, of carving a statue or painting a picture depicting some popular athlete who might be his friend, in all the glory of his physical strength and beauty, or of a divinity conceived in the form of an idealized human being, who might be his personal god and his own hero. The more of newness, of variety and of originality that the artist could bring to his task the better. His immediate patron was the city; the basis of taste was established by its most intelligent and civilized citizens, of whom he himself was one, and ideas were not allowed to crystallize because there was complete freedom of criticism throughout the community.

So long as the Greek cities existed, the same liberal criticism on the part of the public continued, and the same freedom of expression was permitted to the artist. But with the rise once more of imperial power in Greece from about 300 B.C., patronage rapidly became more restricted and control consequently became more severe. The extreme rigidity of supervision exercised in the ancient world did not at once return. Princes, nobles and patricians all had their say, and even in imperial Rome there were artists working more or less as free individuals, at liberty to execute the commissions of different patrons as and when occasion arose, even if the more imposing buildings, statues and paintings were done at the expense, and hence more or less directly under the control, of the Emperor. A work like Trajan's column at Rome, which records in a long series of reliefs that twine around it like a corkscrew, the narrative of one of the emperors' campaigns, shows this imperial phase of patronage quite clearly; the Ara Pacis represents another example of the same controlled art. But



alongside these more grandiose official monuments, reliefs and paintings of a more intimate character were being produced, and at Pompeii each householder, even if his house was quite small and insignificant, employed an artist to decorate his walls with the type of picture he liked best. Sometimes the paintings portrayed humans, sometimes animals, sometimes landscapes, sometimes fantastic forms of architecture, and sometimes formal decorative patterns, and each is distinct from the other because the patron demanded something different. Even in religious art there was the same variety, for the religious hierarchy had but little influence. If any control was exercised by religion, it was done not so much through the priesthood as through the Emperor, who was himself regarded as a divine or semi-divine figure. Severe conservatism was thus impossible, for the Emperor remained an individual, and the tastes of one were not necessarily the tastes of another.

With the adoption of Christianity as the official religion, the situation changed once again, and control tended to become more strict, for within a century or so of the official adoption of the new religion in the year 330, patronage had passed to a very great extent into the hands of the Church. Indeed by the sixth century Byzantine art had become essentially a religious art, and secular works, whether in architecture, sculpture, painting or in the sumptuous minor arts for which the Byzantines were so famed, were of very secondary importance in comparison with the religious ones. At first, naturally enough, there was a good deal of variation in the manner of depicting the scenes and figures of the new faith, for no art is born out of nothing, and all sorts of figures, scenes, backgrounds, and styles were borrowed from Greece, Rome and the East. They served as the foundations from which figures and themes of a purely Christian character were developed. But even by the sixth century the borrowings had been unified; an elaborate but strictly conservative iconographical system had been evolved, and each figure of

the faith, saint, prophet, apostle and so on, had assumed his own attributes of costume and of physiognomy. By the ninth century it was just as impossible for the artist to depart from the set forms of this iconography as it had been in ancient Egypt. But as the Christian faith was a universal one, the artist had a greater degree of personal freedom, and he was free to interpret the theme as he wished, though he could not remodel it. In most cases also, the artists were quite clearly men of profound faith, and any undue intrusion of self into their art would have appeared as impious to them as to the religious hierarchy which sponsored their work.

As a result of this the art was, comparatively speaking, a very static one, and there was less change in the manner of depicting the Bible scenes between the sixth and the sixteenth centuries in the orthodox Christian world than there was in the Italy of the fifteenth century during the lifetime of one single painter. This does not mean, however, that the art was necessarily arid or lacking in imagination. The set form could be recreated from year to year by means of slight variations and personal touch, in just the same way that a play of Shakespeare is recreated each time it is performed. Not all the re-creations, of course, were of the first order, but many of them were, and we have in recent times become sufficiently familiar with some of the more outstanding examples to realize the quality of this art which was so severely condemned by the critics of the nineteenth century. Indeed we know that the historical concept formulated by Gibbon of a long decline and eventual collapse was not only incorrect in itself, but was even more misleading when applied to the history of art. Byzantine art indeed underwent a series of astonishing revivals in the course of its long story, and at least four of these, in the sixth, ninth, twelfth and fourteenth centuries, were in their own ways little less fruitful than the Italian Renaissance itself, even if they were less widespread as regards effect.

Patronage was similarly in the hands of the Church in the mediæval age in the West. Indeed, except during

the most flourishing years of Carolingian and Ottonian power in Germany, the role of the Church was probably even more important in the west than in the east of Europe, for in the latter it was mitigated by imperial power, whereas in the West, especially in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, many of the rulers were either too short-lived or too weak to exercise very much influence themselves. As in the Byzantine world, the Christian faith was a governing factor, and naturally enough a set iconography and a limitation of subject matter to the Christian story as told in the Bible and Apocrypha was the result. As in the Orthodox world, the artist was himself a believer, who was willing to sink his own personality in anonymity, the work being dedicated to the greater glory of God, so that mediæval art in east and west Europe alike was an essentially spiritual art, and on the comparatively few occasions that great works were sponsored by some private individual, they remained just as truly Christian as those produced under the direct patronage of the Church. Only occasionally was a small figure of the donor, offering a church or its decoration to some divine or saintly figure, allowed to obtrude itself into an otherwise completely religious repertory. Western art of the Romanesque period was, however, distinct from the Byzantine, not only in style, but also in the fact that the artist was allowed, or insisted upon, a greater freedom with regard both to realism and to fantasy. The strange little devils, the grotesque heads and the humorous drolleries of Romanesque sculpture illustrate this individuality and independence of the artist. They are quite without parallel in the Byzantine world.

A strict adherence to a set iconography survived in Byzantine art until the Turkish conquests of the fifteenth century put a stop to anything but rather artificial developments. From that time forward art in east Europe, what is today the Orthodox world—except for Russia—assumed an essentially “peasant” character. But in the West development continued, and the change from the Romanesque to the Gothic ages was a very

vital one. It is characterized above anything else by the growing importance of the secular patron and the gradual intrusion of purely secular themes. A striking example of this change is offered by a page of an outstandingly fine manuscript now at Chantilly, known as the "Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry". This superb manuscript was illustrated by three brothers of the name of Limburg, under the patronage of the Duc de Berry, about 1410. The pictures, apart from those depicting the seasons, are Bible scenes; the one referred to is the Temptation of Our Lord, where He is invited by the Devil to cast Himself down from the top of a high mountain (Pl. 6). The story is told in the background of the picture, but the whole centre and foreground are occupied by an elaborate view of one of the Duke's favourite castles. The Duke obviously wanted it to be shown, and the artist equally obviously took great delight in painting it. But such subordination of sacred to profane matter would not only have been quite impossible in Romanesque times, when the Church was in sole control, but also quite unthinkable, since reverence and faith would surely not have countenanced it. But by about 1400 the patron was no longer content to suppress his personal interests in favour of those of the Church or faith, even if he regarded himself, as he no doubt did, as a most pious and Christian person.

This change of attitude had of course not become universal when the manuscript was illuminated, though the turn of the century around 1400 was an important date in the history of art, for from that time onwards secular motifs became more and more important, and at the same time the role of individual as patrons became comparatively widespread. Indeed, as wealth became more evenly distributed, the social class from which the patrons were drawn was considerably extended, and their numbers began to increase with great rapidity. The days when an emperor could hold half the civilized world under his sway had passed, and even the Church was soon to cease to be either rich or

powerful enough to do very much on its own, unaided from outside. Instead city councils or guilds acted as patrons on the one hand ; and on the other the numerous princelings and nobles who were beginning to assert their power became even more ardent sponsors of art. And just as these men struggled with one another for supremacy in the political sphere, so they vied one with the other to procure the best artists. The artists were free to move from patron to patron, and each patron demanded something new and enterprising from the artist in return for his protection. As a result not only were large numbers of local schools established, for each artist of quality tended to draw followers and pupils to him, but also there was a fresh temptation to search for new ideas and new themes, and to intensify the brilliance of art. This tendency was most marked in Venice, where trading contacts with the East had led to a love of luxury and decorative exuberance unequalled elsewhere in Italy. It reached its height in the sixteenth century, in the work of such painters as Titian or Paolo Veronese, the former delighting to paint rich velvets and silks in such a way that one can almost feel their texture, while the latter transposed the scenes of the Bible into a rich contemporary setting, so that their original purport was at times hardly perceptible. His rendering of " The Marriage of Cana ", for instance, takes the form of a sort of civic banquet, set on a terrace before a background of classical architecture (Pl. 11). The number of participants runs into dozens ; all are clothed in the most gorgeous costumes conceivable, and an orchestra such as would have graced a state banquet in Venice is also included.

It was, however, in the respect of selecting new themes that the greatest changes came about in the fifteenth century. It was no longer enough to depict the Bible story or the lives of the Saints, as had been the case in the past. Both patrons and artists sought to widen the repertory, and from the inclusion of local elements in Biblical pictures there soon grew up the idea of concentration upon views of the local countryside or its

towns and castles, even if there was a passage from the Christian story to accompany it. More important still, however, was the growth in Italy of an interest in classical literature and classical art, and by about 1500 scenes culled from the former and figures modelled upon examples of Roman sculpture had become well-nigh as important as the Christian ones. The influence of patrons in the choice of these new themes was of outstanding importance.

North of the Alps changes were far less rapid and less wide-sweeping than in Italy, and though the Church as such tended to play a less important role as patron as time went on, the nobles and even more the growing class of rich burghers and merchants tended to be more conservative than their Italian counterparts, and when they commissioned works they were, as often as not, altar pieces or similar pictures of a conservative character. These were presented to their favourite churches and chapels by the patrons who had had them done. But with the sixteenth century new ideas began to penetrate northwards from Italy, and tastes for secular themes became more pronounced, even if the demands of the northern patrons were quite distinct from those in Italy. In place of altar pieces or large paintings suited to palaces, pictures which could be set up in the home or in the town halls were demanded. In Italy, with the classical past at the door, classical themes were usually the most popular; in the north, where the classical world was less accessible and where the tastes and education of the new patrons had not always been founded on a purely classical basis, other subjects were more favoured. Thus landscapes, the interiors of houses, portraits, genre pictures, still lifes, and so on were produced in quite large numbers. The reasons for this preference are obvious; on the one hand houses in the north were mostly comparatively small, and pictures were wanted which could be put inside them, and on the other, tastes were not attuned either to subjects of classical learning, or to the grand and pompous renderings of religious themes which had become the

fashion in Italy. The burghers and merchants of the north in fact wanted something intimate and personal, with which they could live, and something which was associated more directly with their own, rather material lives. The more poetic among these patrons no doubt chose landscapes, the more egoistical portraits, and those who loved good living were perhaps responsible for choosing those monotonous depictions of dead hares, cooked lobsters or masses of fruit which represent the more depressing aspect of Dutch art in the seventeenth century.

The tendency in this direction was greatly accentuated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when the northern world became actually more important as a centre of creative art than Italy. Indeed, to judge by the quantity of pictures that survives, the number of patrons in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century must have been enormous. They were mostly drawn from the class of burghers who had been made prosperous by the cloth trade. Similarly, the eighteenth century saw a corresponding growth of patronage in England as a result of new wealth, which had been accumulated partly thanks to agricultural improvements and partly as a result of the East Indian trade. The link between economic prosperity, the increase in the number of patrons, and the type and size of pictures produced, was in fact at this time extremely close; to study it is one of the more intriguing side-lines of art history.

Another interesting aspect of art patronage in the eighteenth century, especially in Britain, was a gradual decline in the influence of the towns and of town life. Indeed, as the century proceeded, the role of the country house also developed, and by the middle of the century the country house had almost become a patron in itself. It was the setting and nucleus around which the other arts revolved. And if the principal patron of the mediæval world was the Church, of Italy the princeling, and of the Netherlands the burgher, in eighteenth-century Britain it was not so much the country gentleman as the country house.

With the nineteenth century changes in the character of patronage were even more marked, not only because wealth became distributed anew, but also because the Industrial Revolution was making the new manufacturing towns the main centres of prosperity and development. The chief patrons were now business men, accustomed to buying and selling, and it was perhaps because of this that the character of patronage altered more markedly around the eighteen-fifties than for many hundreds of years before, for it became the custom for a patron to acquire the finished product, selecting as and where he felt inclined, rather than to commission a work or to support an artist over a given period while some special command was executed. The artist was in fact given a market to satisfy. He was free to do so in whatever way he wished, as well as how and when he wished, and in this respect he obtained a new liberty which was practically unknown before. But he obtained this freedom at the cost of personal economic security, for if his works were not in tune with popular taste they would not sell. It is probable that these changes were responsible for such stimulating movements in art as the Pre-Raphaelite in England and that of Impressionism in France, together with the numerous other "isms" that have followed in their steps. But the new situation also meant that the artist might well have to starve if he persisted in doing what he believed to be right in face of a contemporary public opinion which was antagonistic and would not agree to the purchase of his wares on the open market. In the old days of individual patronage one man at least nearly always arose, who had the perspicacity to discern quality, however obscure it was to the multitude.

This great change, which was brought about as a result of nineteenth-century commercialism, has subsequently been very considerably affected by changing economic conditions, especially in the last decade or so. There is thus no longer a class of patrons able to commission works, and even those who are prepared to buy are too poor to buy much or often. The day of



the great patron has passed, and the little patrons, even if they are more numerous, can hardly support the artists by means of the small-scale purchases that they can make. Moreover, owing to present-day housing conditions, the works they can buy are necessarily small in size, and practically no artist gets an opportunity of doing something on a large scale or in the grand manner except on the rarest occasions. Size in itself is no criterion of quality, and many of the world's greatest pictures are small. Yet it is without doubt a handicap for all art to be restricted in this way. Perhaps some form of communal patronage will eventually be forthcoming, as at certain ages in the past. But if so it will be neither Emperor nor Church that has the controlling say, but the Government of a welfare state. In ancient Greece the patronage of the democratic city-state produced results of the very highest significance. But it may be questioned whether state patronage in such a society as ours is at present is likely to bring about results of similar excellence.

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## CHAPTER IV

### ART AND TASTE

THE type of art that has been most appreciated by patrons and public has varied very considerably, not only between country and country, but also from one period to another. But in the past taste has usually been fairly stable within the limits of each period, in that things of the same kind have been admired and there has been little of that antagonism between diverse styles which characterizes the appreciation of art today, as well as the output of the more modern and the more conservative artists. Such distinctions as did exist in the past seem in the main to have been associated with social distinctions, or with what the economists of today would call "income groups". In the Flemish world, for example, the great difference between the works of Rubens (1577-1640) and Bruegel (1520-69) is to be accounted for not so much by the half-century that separates them in date, as because of the very different patrons each of them sought to serve. Rubens, with his love of classical subjects, could hardly have been fully appreciated by anyone who had not had a classical education. The work of Bruegel, with the peasant weddings and themes based on everyday life in the Netherlands, would have appealed to a very different class of person; indeed he set out to do so, executing numerous engravings for popular circulation among a clientele to which Rubens' great baroque compositions would have been incomprehensible. Had he not been a master of outstanding merit, many of his pictures would doubtless have seemed to the man of noble upbringing over-boorish and clumsy, in any case with regard to their choice of subject.

At the present day, however, the wide differences between the types of art that are produced has little to do with class or economic distinction, and it is

hardly even a question of education. Indeed, the most "modern" pictures, those that may be termed the most "left wing", are not necessarily appreciated only by those of left-wing politics; still less are they sought after and admired by that group of the population to be described by that irritating late-nineteenth-century term "the masses". In communist Russia the opposite is actually the case, for the extremes of modernism have long been condemned as reactionary or bourgeois, and official art has reverted to an academicism of nineteenth-century character. The most modern types of art are really only fully appreciated by a group which is distinguished neither by social nor by economic criteria, but rather by those of æsthetic understanding. This group may be termed that of the "art intellectuals", and it is surely one of the faults of this age that much of its contemporary art should be understood and appreciated only by the members of so narrow and specialized a circle.

This is actually a fairly recent manifestation, dating only from the nineteenth century when, as a result of the Industrial Revolution, artistic taste developed along very special lines. Before that time, taste was a good deal more uniform, and even if the aims and ideals that the artists had before them differed, the style of their work was broadly speaking the same. This does not mean, of course, that all artists were working in exactly the same manner, or that there were not very wide distinctions of style and subject matter between the works of the various individuals. There were very wide divergencies. But the main guiding principles were all the same. Thus in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries all artists were alike tied to naturalism, all revered the work of the later Renaissance painters on the Continent, even including Blake who was the most outstanding rebel, and all tended to pay great attention to the subject matter of their pictures, to the extent that elaborate paintings were more greatly respected than simple ones, and subject pictures were considered as on the whole more significant

than landscapes. Still-life compositions were hardly considered at all, for though they had been done with great distinction in France and Holland in the early eighteenth and seventeenth centuries, such paintings had fallen into disfavour, and it was the great compositions of subject painters like the Carracci or Caravaggio, and some of the more majestic Raphaels, like his cartoons for the Sistine tapestries now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, that were most admired. As the eighteenth century gave place to the nineteenth, this taste for subject painting increased, and in addition to scenes drawn from the Christian or classical repertoires, it became the fashion also to depict others from the lives of great men of the past, like Charlemagne, Giotto or Dante.

This taste for subject painting was a direct development of the love of what was in the full eighteenth century called "history" painting, and which was so much advocated by Sir Joshua Reynolds and those painters who were to become the first members of the Royal Academy when it was founded in 1768. Though Reynolds was himself essentially a portrait painter, he continually preached the cult of "history", advising painters to turn to the past for their themes, and students to go to Italy and study the great masters there; and for him the great masters were the men of the sixteenth century, who painted large subject pictures, and not those of the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries, whom we so much admire today as the "Primitives". Even "history" in itself was not always enough, for there was in addition a zealous cult of the classic, and its devotees urged that art could hardly be considered as art unless it dealt with classical themes. Benjamin West, who became President of the Royal Academy in succession to Reynolds, was even criticized by the extremists for not painting General Wolfe and his entourage in classical costumes when he did a picture of the death of the general at Quebec.

When we look back at the art of the later eighteenth century in Britain, it is the superb portraits of Reynolds

or Gainsborough and the glorious landscapes first of Richard Wilson and then of Constable or Turner that stand out as the great works of the age. But in their own day the landscape painters were hardly noticed at all, and the portraitists were regarded by many as definitely of secondary importance to the subject or "history" painters. The quantity of works in the latter vein that appeared in the exhibitions was very considerable, and they all won great distinction, though today their titles and even the names of many of the painters responsible for them are unknown except to a few specialists.

So far as this country is concerned, there was little of significance produced in the seventeenth century, except for the work of Van Dyck at its outset. But both in France and in Holland painting was in a very flourishing state. Though the work of each country was quite distinct from that of the other, the two had one thing in common, namely that pictures were mostly comparatively small and had in the main rather simple and unassuming themes. Thus interiors like those of Vermeer, landscapes like those of Hobbema, or portraits like those by Franz Hals or Van der Helst were typical of what was being done in Holland. The French perhaps favoured rather more classical and more elaborate themes, especially early in the century, but even there, where contacts with Italy were closer, one of the most outstanding painters, Chardin, was primarily a painter of still lifes and interiors, while Watteau's idylls were small and intimate, as were those of his followers like Lancret or Fragonard. Even though Claude and Poussin drew essentially upon classical themes and models, their works were still usually modest in size, and Claude was essentially a landscapist rather than a classical subject painter. Neither he nor any of his countrymen turned to the themes of the Christian story for their subject matter, and religious pictures were also comparatively rare in Holland, owing to the influence of Calvinist and Lutheran Protestantism, which did not favour religious art. Indeed, faith and social position had a considerable influence on the type of art

which was favoured in different parts of Europe at this time, for the still lifes, landscapes, and so forth which were so popular in Protestant Holland exactly suited the tastes of the bourgeois patrons for whom they were produced, whereas the Catholic nobles of Flanders and Spain preferred the great religious or classical compositions of a Rubens or the grandiose court portraits of a Velazquez.<sup>1</sup>

These men were at the peak of their powers around 1600. Half a century earlier we find that anyhow north of the Alps the best work was being produced for more bourgeois patrons, whose tastes ran towards vigorous scenes often with some allegorical context, though set in surroundings familiar to everyone. Bruegel's "Massacre of the Innocents" (Pl. 12) or Dürer's "Prodigal Son" may serve as examples. The latter was set in a German farmyard with barns in the background and pigs around, the former in a humble Flemish village, in the depth of winter. It no doubt had an additional appeal, in that such scenes were not altogether unusual at the time, when religious intolerance and wars of succession led to numerous acts of rapine and cruelty. Or again pictures like Bruegel's "Die Dulle Griet" which seem to us today strange, if not incomprehensible, were actually illustrations of folk tales or popular beliefs which were at the time universally familiar. The same popular tastes were served by Holbein's woodcuts of "The Dance of Death" which were executed on the Continent before he came to England to make his fame as a portrait painter (Pl. 16). The engravings of Dürer and his contemporaries in Germany, which have Christian themes or popular legends as their subject matter, are to be included in the same class. ●

At an earlier date than this it is not very easy to discern the workings of popular taste, for art was so dependent upon the patronage of Church or nobles that

<sup>1</sup> Tastes of this sort may also be associated with the nature of the psychological make-up of the spectator; see Joan Evans, *Taste and Temperament*, London, 1930. This is, however, a very specialized line of enquiry which cannot be dealt with here.

popular taste was less able to express itself. But the sprightly imps and vivid details of Gothic sculpture and illumination no doubt had a very general appeal, and it seems unlikely that the artist was only pleasing himself when he interpolated these things into great church decorations. He was rather consciously endeavouring to please those of the general public who might see them. Again, the violent swirling compositions and curiously elongated figures that the artists favoured in Romanesque sculpture and painting (Fig. 2) cannot have seemed the least strange to the people who saw them. The "spectacles" which were used by all who went to church, and that included poor and rich alike, were in fact coloured firstly by an intensity of faith, which accepted a certain degree of abstraction as normal, and secondly by old ideas culled from Norse art, which favoured spirals and similar swirling patterns. When the Gothic age, with its more practical outlook, succeeded the Romanesque, tastes must have changed very rapidly. A somewhat similar change has taken place recently, for the more straightforward art of Gothic times was admired as the acme of mediævalism at the end of the last century; today we tend to prefer the more stylized Romanesque. Probably its more abstract approach is more closely in tune with the outlook which is to the fore today.

These periodic changes in taste regarding the type of picture that was most favoured become even more marked when we look outside Christian Europe. Thus the art of Rome, when not concerned with imperialism, was an essentially personal art, and portraiture flourished, especially in sculpture, to a degree hardly paralleled elsewhere until the eighteenth century in Britain. The art of Greece, on the other hand, was hardly concerned with the individual at all, but was confined to the production of idealized types. In China, to enter into a completely distinct and very different sphere, art was governed from very early times by a profoundly philosophical understanding, hardly paralleled elsewhere at any time. The artist sought to achieve an expression of



FIG. 2.—Sculptured Figures from Chartres. Twelfth century.



the infinite, but he chose as his media simple everyday themes. The basis of the art was naturalistic, but nature was approached from a very abstract angle, and at quite an early stage in the history of Chinese painting, artists were analysing and simplifying their subjects in much the same way that Cézanne was analysing and simplifying his views of the Mont St. Victoire in the eighteen-nineties. Everything but the absolute essential was omitted in these paintings, and a few symbols, such as a flowering branch, a seated fisherman, or a distant mountain, form the subject matter of pictures which convey ideas of great profundity, such as the everlasting revival of life in nature, the ideal of patient contemplation, or the eternal nature of the universe.

That the approach to art should have varied very considerably from country to country is not surprising, nor would one expect different ages to have favoured the same sort of subject matter. But vagaries of taste on a narrower horizon are little less distinct, and they form one of the more intriguing sidelines of the study of art. It is perhaps not surprising that the eighteenth-century connoisseur should have admired all things classical, for he was brought up on classical learning, he was taught to revere Italian painting, and a visit to Rome was almost as much a prerequisite of education for the artist as it was for the man of culture and letters. It is, however, quite surprising to learn that there was an opposing school of thought, which extolled all things Gothic in opposition to the classical, and that what is usually termed the Gothic revival was firmly established well before the middle of the eighteenth century. It is true that this Gothic taste had little influence upon painting and that practically all the pictures of the eighteenth century are either basically classical, or in a new vein where the only model was nature, as in the landscapes of Gainsborough. But the reverence for Gothic had a very considerable influence on architecture, and the battle of the styles, classical versus mediæval, was being strenuously waged from 1750 onwards. Even the famous Robert Adam, whom

we know as the foremost of the neo-Classic builders, turned at times to the rival manner. His great house at Culzean in Scotland has battlements and towers like a castle, and his small church at Croome in Worcestershire (1759-63) is a completely Gothic building with pinnacled tower and traceried windows.

During the eighteenth century, however, the victory lay in the main with Classicism. The sponsors of Gothic taste were regarded to some extent as eccentrics, and their ideas affected only a comparatively narrow circle. But with the dawn of the nineteenth century the fashion for the revival of Gothic began to spread, and before the middle of the century the Gothic style had become universal for church building and not unusual in domestic architecture. Its popularity in the former sphere was greatly increased by the fact that it was sponsored by the leaders of religion during the first half of the nineteenth century, and was employed for the churches of the new towns which were springing up with astonishing rapidity as a result of the Industrial Revolution.

If the first hints of the Gothic Revival in the architecture of the eighteenth century were not paralleled in painting, its continuance around 1800 saw a sudden blooming of a more or less Gothic style at the hands of Blake, and a few lesser figures of whom the most important was Fuseli. And with the nineteenth century there came the birth of another movement in painting, which we know as the Pre-Raphaelite, which again looked back for inspiration, if not to the Gothic world of the north, at least to a closely similar style of painting in Italy, which had but little in common with the mannerism and eclecticism of the sixteenth century. Elaborate compositions, the stressing of emotion and movement, and the use of *chiaroscuro* (the idea of giving as much importance to shading as to light) were thus discarded in favour of simpler, more static themes, and fresh, brilliant colours, where deep shading had as little part to play as in the miniatures of a mediæval manuscript.

The efforts of this new school met at first, with considerable opposition. Like most things that are fresh and unusual in art, the new style was not understood by the wider public, and even the critics, with Ruskin at their head, attacked it and its protagonists in no unmeasured terms. But within twenty years it had become established, and the rich merchants of the industrial cities bought Pre-Raphaelite paintings in considerable numbers for themselves and commissioned works by Pre-Raphaelite painters for the town halls of those industrial cities to which they belonged. But by the end of the century the tide was again on the turn, and advanced taste of the day either forsook the Pre-Raphaelites entirely, or at best accepted their works with a somewhat condescending acknowledgement.

Thus within a few generations public taste had revolved over almost two complete cycles. It was to continue revolving, each generation tending to discard what its immediate predecessors had admired, and to revive a taste for what the predecessor had discarded. Indeed, in the last hundred years or thereabouts there has arisen a veritable passion for revivals which is probably most apparent in architecture, where neo-Classic has given place to neo-Gothic, neo-Gothic to neo-Elizabethan, neo-Elizabethan to neo-Georgian and so on, all with astonishing rapidity. And when the styles of the past have failed to satisfy the imagination, recourse has been made to the ancient world or to the arts of primitive peoples. We have thus seen the neo-Egyptian style in architecture, the influence of Negro art on sculpture, as in the work of Modigliani, or the play of the atmosphere of the South Sea Islands in painting, as in the work of Gauguin. One of the most characteristic features of the last hundred years, indeed, is the amazing speed with which tastes have changed and the amazing variety of styles that have been favoured one after the other.

All this is most confusing to the would-be amateur of art—using the word in its literal sense as applying to one who loves art, rather than in the more recent but

decadent one, which implies the practice of something in a non-professional capacity. The amateur hardly knows where to begin. When he has once begun, he hardly knows how to keep pace with the changes. But, in reality, he does not need to be confused. The most recent enthusiasms of the highbrow critics, their latest rediscoveries of forgotten and often insignificant figures, really need not concern him at all. It is all great fun for those who have learnt to play the game, but there is no need to play that particular game in order to enjoy works of art. What is of real value will make its impression on the spectator in the end, even if his first efforts in the way of admiring art may sometimes lead to subsequent disappointments. What one first admires often seems to one later to be worthless, because one's tastes develop with experience. But all that is of real value in art will eventually rise above the changing tastes of the day and will have an appeal irrespective of age or provenance. Indeed, the only sort of taste that need concern the amateur at first is a taste for quality.

The power to discern quality is something very hard to define. Some people are born with it, and inevitably turn to the best. Others have to cultivate it by means of knowledge, trial and error. It can, however, be cultivated by humbly accepting the judgements of time, and when once a person has made himself a judge of older things, where his taste can be guided and helped by the experience gained by others through many generations, he will soon find that he has a sound basis from which he can progress. Not every man will, of course, necessarily like the same things. But every man should put himself in a position to see why a certain work that has been revered through the ages is good, even if he himself is not affected by it. And when once this understanding has been established in respect of things familiar, it is not so hard to extend its scope to the consideration of things unfamiliar. This problem of the discernment of quality will be dealt with in the following chapter, for it is actually something independent of taste. Taste, as we have seen, changes from age to

age ; quality is static, and a thing that is good will always be good, even if its popularity varies. The problem of taste is really that of what kind of good thing we chose to select at some particular moment in the world's history from the great mass that exists, and our tastes regarding the art of the past will probably run to a great extent parallel with our tastes regarding the art of the present. It is this generation, with its affection for the abstract, that has rediscovered Romanesque ; it was the Italians of the fifteenth century, with their love of enquiry, exactitude and perfection, who rediscovered Classicism. What will be rediscovered by our children it is impossible to tell.

## CHAPTER V

### THE QUESTION OF QUALITY

OF all the problems that confront the lover of art, one of the most important is that of discerning and determining quality. It is certainly with this that the critic is mainly concerned, for it is his primary business to distinguish what is really good, or has the potentiality of being so, from that which is secondary. But it also concerns very closely the ordinary person who likes to look at works of art, for when he first comes to look at them it is not always easy to know what to admire and still less why one should admire it. And even if one is profoundly affected by a work of art, it may be for reasons which one afterwards comes to learn are the wrong ones. Of all things it is probably quality in art that is hardest to describe in words and hardest to define in print. In this chapter and the one that follows, however, an attempt will be made to put forward a few pointers, first regarding the nature of quality, and then regarding the way in which pictures may be analysed in order to discern it.

To begin with, several distinct degrees of quality exist. It is thus necessary on the one hand to distinguish between the true and the false, between works which are honest and sincere and those which are superficially attractive but which, on closer acquaintance, prove to be without real merit because they are either cheap or ephemeral. On the other hand, it is essential to realize that there are many works of art which are not really of the very first order, though they are, nevertheless, perfectly honest and sincere, and are therefore not to be condemned, though equally they are not necessarily to be included among the world's greatest products. One cannot, for example, include a water colour by such a painter as Girtin in the same category as a great painting by Titian, though the Girtin is

definitely "good" and is still in its own way a work of real artistic significance. It cannot be compared with the Titian because it is on a less ambitious scale, and because the aims that engendered it were quite distinct. But it also cannot be compared with works of a completely meretricious character, such as the imitation Louis Seize paintings which are to be encountered in the state-rooms of liners or the lounges in certain of our modern hotels.

When once the observer has some acquaintance with works of art, it is probably not very difficult for him to select a number of examples which are undoubtedly of the very highest order, such as Leonardo da Vinci's "Last Supper", Michelangelo's frescoes in the Sistine Chapel, the sculptures of the Parthenon, or a Rubens landscape like his "Rainbow" in the Wallace Collection (Pl. 13). Such works as these have been recognized as outstanding over a very long period, by peoples of very diverse tastes, and they have been accepted and acclaimed by all critics, whatever their particular predilections. They are among the world's greatest masterpieces.

But these outstanding masterpieces are comparatively few in number, and even the greatest masters probably only executed one or two such things in the whole course of their careers, and there remains the vaster mass of the more general run of the works of these men, as well as the very much more considerable mass of the works of other painters who may perhaps never have reached the very summit of genius. Many of these men have long been known and esteemed; others may be said to be fairly recent discoveries, in that quite often men whom we now know to be great have passed through a period of oblivion. Thus, for example, Vermeer is today accorded a very high place in the esteem of the enlightened public, and his pictures are not only of extreme rarity and consequently very highly priced, but are also very greatly valued on æsthetic grounds. But soon after his death he had been so far forgotten that there is hardly any mention of his name

between the early eighteenth and the late nineteenth centuries.

Or again there are other men whom we now know to be great who were condemned by their own generation as charlatans, 'or at best,' as incompetent bunglers. It has sometimes been the fashion among young artists of recent times to assert that genius has seldom been recognized till too late. Though a few great men have in their own day been disregarded, it is as a generality very far from true to say that great genius has always been misunderstood, and it is much easier to think of the names of great men who achieved fame in their own day than it is to draw up lists of those who were spurned. Michelangelo, Raphael, Leonardo ; the Van Eycks, Memlinc or Dürer ; Rubens, Velazquez or Van Dyck ; all were prosperous and famous during their lives. Of the spurned ones the most outstanding is of course Rembrandt. But even he was comparatively successful during his youth, though as his style developed, his popularity declined, and before he had reached middle age he was disregarded or condemned by potential patrons, and he died in poverty and wretchedness. But soon after his death his style, or certain aspects of it, achieved considerable popularity, and it was consequently copied by a herd of imitators, some of them genuine admirers who were not great enough to conceive a style of their own, and others frankly deceivers, whose object was to produce fake Rembrandts—for within a generation of his death the master's work had assumed a rarity value, and to make successful forgeries of it held forth prospects of considerable financial gain. Rembrandt's pictures have been treasured and continually sought after by collectors ever since. Like many great men, Rembrandt was in advance of his time and his style was not appreciated by his contemporaries, though taste rapidly developed to a degree where it could be understood. This was not the case with regard to Vermeer. His work was not vilified because it was in advance of its day ; it simply failed to attract attention, so that it was lost among a mass of material



that was really of quite secondary importance, in comparison.

In a distinct category again are works which are admittedly interesting and full of merit, but which now somehow or other fail to impress in the way that they once used to impress. For example, though Caravaggio is regarded as a painter of importance, we would not today class him with Michelangelo or Raphael, as did Reynolds and the other leading critics and connoisseurs of the eighteenth century. Nor do we regard the Laocoon group in the Vatican as the finest piece of sculpture ever produced in antiquity, though this position was certainly accorded to it at one time, and it served as the very centre and hub of nearly all eighteenth-century art criticism and æsthetic analysis. Thus Winckelmann, the first to write a serious critical study of classical art, spoke of the group continually. Lessing used its name as the title of his great work on æsthetics, which was really an enquiry into the true nature of the visual arts as opposed to that of poetry, and Spence, in his *Polymetis*, devoted a long analysis to the same theme with frequent references to the Laocoon statue. Yet today it is rather because of all these associations that the sculpture is studied and admired than because it succeeds in exciting any admiration of a truly æsthetic character. Nor, again, do we revere the Gothic style of architecture with quite the same fervour that our Victorian forefathers accorded to it, nor look at Japanese prints with the same enthusiasm as did the Edwardians. No one would of course seek to denigrate the importance of Gothic architecture or Japanese art unduly, but the Romanesque style has to some extent replaced the Gothic in popular favour, while Japanese art as a whole is now generally looked upon as inferior to Chinese. In all these cases changes of taste have been at play. But however much taste may have altered, work which is definitely lacking in quality has never survived for any great length of time, even if that which was once praised as of the highest excellence does not always succeed in maintaining that place today.

In a distinct category from the few really outstanding works are the vast arrays of good paintings, sculptures and so on which occupy the larger portion of the wall space in the great art galleries of the world. Some of these are the lesser works of the greater masters, some the greater works of the lesser men. And it is in studying these that the art lover needs to exercise some caution, for he may easily be led to admire a work more ardently than it deserves because of the name attaching to it, or to pass over without attention an intrinsically better work, merely because there is no great name associated with it. From the art-historical or art-biographical point of view this may be justified, for the work of the great man may reflect some particular aspect of his character and his talent, and therefore be of value because it serves to throw a new light on the development of his style or on his personality, whereas the character and personality of the lesser man is probably unknown and certainly awakens no enthusiasm of this sort. From the purely æsthetic standpoint, however, such considerations are void, and when quality alone claims attention, the good work of the lesser man may be deserving of a very high place. Further, we must not forget that the great men occasionally nodded.

Nor should enthusiasm for period be allowed to play a part in the determination of quality, though it may very easily tend to do so. Some people thus prefer works in the primitive style, some those in the baroque. Some rejoice almost indiscriminately in all that belongs to one particular century; others can only obtain full enjoyment from one particular type of subject matter. Some like simple, others only the most sophisticated forms of art. But all this is a matter of personal predilection, and has nothing to do with basic quality, for one cannot say that a good "primitive" is better than a good baroque picture, or that all works of the fifteenth century are better than all those of the eighteenth, even if artistic products in the one style or the one period may have been conceived on purer principles or executed with greater clarity of purpose. Good works have been

produced in practically every style and at practically every period, even if some periods have been more universally excellent than others.

It is, however, no easy matter to indicate how quality is to be discerned irrespective of established indications. To the average man the great names, and the appraisal of generations that they presuppose, are the most obvious guides, and he would be lost as in an uncharted sea without them. But just as the experienced mariner can dispense with mechanical aids and still bring his ship to port, so the observer, when once he has trained his eye, can become a judge of quality without the names to guide him. It is really only by taking the canons of the great critics—Ruskin, Burkhardt, Von Bode, Friedlander or Fry for instance—and by constantly looking and comparing the actual works with their canons in mind that proper standards of judgement can be formed. The word “their” is however essential, for each of these men had his own tastes, his own enthusiasm and his own dislikes, which were coloured by the tastes of his generation, and it is only by balancing the views of one of them against those of another that a just conclusion can be reached. With the views of such men as a basis, the formation and development of a personal sense of quality can then be developed as a completely individual matter.

A few fortunate people are born with instinctive powers of discernment and are natural judges of quality. It may be the quality of a picture, of the essence of a metal, or of cattle at a market; whatever it is, the faculty to distinguish quality is there, and needs only to be cultivated by practice. But the mass of us have to develop the faculty, and we can only do so with the aid of learning and by constant application and observation. Harmony of colour, delicacy and strength of line, balance of composition, are probably the most important concrete items that help in the distinction of quality—yet all these things may be present in a work of art, though the work remains dull and arid. Indeed, something more than good colour, firm outline and clear

balance is essential. It is the spirit of life, and without it a work of art, however perfect intrinsically, will nevertheless lack movement and therefore lack quality. Ingres once modelled a picture on Raphael's "Sistine Madonna" (Pl. 10). It resembles the Raphael closely in every respect; according to academic rules its composition is probably better; its scheme of colour is just as satisfactory, even if the texture falls short. Yet it is dull and arid beside the Raphael, and one would not turn to look twice at it had one the opportunity of seeing the Raphael instead.

Apart from the question of pure quality, that of degree also arises. It is obvious that a small water colour, done in half an hour, is hardly as important as an oil or a fresco, done in the course of many weeks' or even months' hard work. Yet, æsthetically speaking, it may have greater value, because it has life and a freshness which the more elaborate work lacks. In judging works, then, the intrinsic character of the work should not be forgotten. We can enjoy a hurried sketch by Constable just as much as, perhaps even more than, one of his most elaborate and finished pictures. But we cannot say that it is a better picture. It may have a greater freshness and brilliance, but it must inevitably lack something of the profundity of the more finished work, and the degree of profundity must be taken into account as well as the degree of charm, even if sometimes charm has been lost in the search for profundity.

In addition to judgements made on purely æsthetic grounds, it must be remembered that there are possibly also other reasons why a picture or work of art should be preserved and considered. These hardly come within the category of quality, but they still deserve brief mention. A picture may thus record the appearance of some lost building and have an importance which is primarily historical. Zoffany's painting of the Tribuna, the great central hall of the Pitti Gallery in Florence, begun in 1772 is a case in point, as is his study of the life class at the Royal Academy, in which most of the outstanding members of the Academy are

shown (Pl. 18 (b)). Both are extraordinarily interesting because they show us how an eighteenth-century gallery or school was arranged; they record which of the great pictures in the collection were placed in that particular gallery, or show what some of the principal painters of the time looked like and how they set about their business. But as pictures both are ill-composed, overcrowded and confused, and their æsthetic value is inconsiderable, though they have a certain charm of their own. There are numerous pictures of similar character in our galleries which have definite historical value, and which are undoubtedly attractive, though they are not really good pictures. There are others which are almost curiosities, but which still afford pleasure as well as interest to the observer. Their æsthetic claims should not be exaggerated, but they need not be condemned as worthless as some authorities sometimes tend to condemn them. An admirable case for a whole series of such works has been presented by Klingender in his fascinating book, *Art and the Industrial Revolution*.

Another reason why works which are not truly important from the æsthetic point of view may nevertheless be of value is because they serve to illustrate some little-known period of the world's art. The famous Consular Diptychs of the fifth and sixth centuries may be included in this category. Most of them can hardly be called beautiful or attractive works of art in themselves, but they are nevertheless of the very first importance to archæologists and art historians, for they constitute the most important examples of the art of a very vital period, when ideas were changing and a new style was being born to serve the Christian faith rather than paganism. And in addition they are nearly all dated, so that they serve as indispensable guides among a mass of material which it is otherwise almost impossible to assign to any but the very vaguest periods.

Works which are not in themselves great may again be of very considerable value in the study of the iconography of a particular theme, and show us from what

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origins other works of greater significance actually sprang. For example, a great deal of painting was done upon the walls of churches in Italy before the fourteenth century. Much of it is, æsthetically speaking, of poor quality,<sup>9</sup> yet it is all of great significance in the study of the history of Italian art, and unless we know just what such painters as Cimabue, Giotto or Duccio took over from the past, it is quite impossible to estimate the importance of their own contributions. Vasari thus looked upon Giotto as a sort of bolt from the blue, and suggested that he suddenly started to paint living works, whereas everything before him had been arid or moribund. But the study that we have in recent years been able to give to pre-fourteenth-century painting in Italy and in the Byzantine world shows quite clearly that Giotto was not nearly as much of an innovator as was at one time imagined; his debt to the Byzantine world and to a number of anonymous men who went before him was very considerable. His real genius lay in carrying forward the ideas prevalent in his own day so rapidly that at his death he was nearly a century in advance of his time. Works just as lively and fresh as Giotto's were being produced at exactly the same time in the Byzantine world, notably for the decoration of the church of the Chora at Constantinople (1310-20), and for that of the Twelve Apostles at Salonica (1312), by artists who have remained anonymous. But these remained isolated and did not serve as the basis for a pyramid of new ideas and developments, as did the works of Giotto for nearly a century after his death.

All the various works of art which are to be defined as interesting or charming rather than as great are probably more of interest to specialists than to the layman, and in many of the larger museums and galleries of today they are arranged in what are usually called the subsidiary collections, while the really great works are shown in more or less chronological order in the main collection. This is an admirable system, for it enables the layman to see the very best of each age without being bothered by the lesser works or by the

problem of asking himself just how important such and such a work is, in comparison to another one. The specialist, who is interested in some particular period, or in the iconography of a special theme, can study at leisure in the subsidiary collections. Nowhere is this system to be seen more effectively employed than in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

In opposition to works which are primarily of specialized interest is another group composed of those which tend to have an especial appeal to the layman or casual visitor, but which are spurned by the specialist. In nearly every gallery there is some work which is particularly popular, and of which many more reproductions are sold than of all other pictures in the gallery put together. Sometimes the favourite picture is a really great one which the specialist tends to avoid because it has become hackneyed. Such a one is Leonardo da Vinci's "Mona Lisa" in the Louvre, which is probably the most familiar picture in the world, and which practically every visitor to Paris would try to see, even if otherwise he never went near an art gallery, though the specialist, who visits the Louvre regularly, would perhaps tend to pass it by. Sometimes the favourite is a good but not quite so great picture, as for instance Franz Hals' "Laughing Cavalier", which is probably the most popular picture in the Wallace Collection in London. Practically every specialist and critic would agree that Rubens' "Rainbow" landscape (Pl. 13), Rembrandt's "The Centurion Cornelius" or Reynolds' "Nelly O'Brien", all in the same collection, are more important as works of art, for "The Laughing Cavalier" is in some ways rather superficial. But it is very striking on first sight, and even if it does not maintain its appeal in the way that many more sombre works tend to do, it is nevertheless a work of high quality.

At times, on the other hand, the most popular picture is one which the specialist would class as definitely unimportant. Thus in the Corporation gallery at Liverpool, W. F. Yeames' "When did you last

see your Father ? " is the favourite, while in the National Gallery of Scotland at Edinburgh it is Bastierr Le Page's " Pas Mèche ". Both of these, though not frankly bad, are, none the less, works of insignificant quality in comparison to some fifty per cent of the other pictures in the galleries. And the same is the case in many other galleries, where pictures that are even really very bad attract numerous admirers, while good ones nearby are disregarded.

The cynical critic would say that this is because the taste of the general public is execrable. But this is really not a satisfactory explanation. The point is rather that such works as the Yeames or the Bastien Le Page are easy to understand. They are like a first reader in an unfamiliar language ; they use short words and simple constructions, which do not necessitate great knowledge of the new tongue, and consequently can be appreciated at first acquaintance. But as familiarity increases, the simple sentence tends to pall, and the reader becomes able to appreciate longer words and more complicated phrases, until in the end he is capable of reading the best literature and of appreciating it because of its stylistic excellence. So with the pictures, an attractive, and probably also sentimental subject tends to draw the observer's attention, and if the construction is simple and the colour pleasing he will doubtless find real satisfaction in looking at it. But after a time it will lose its appeal. His eye will demand more complicated and elaborate constructions, and his mind will tire of the sentimental subject matter. As with a popular tune, the attraction soon passes, and it is found that only the more serious appeal of the classical symphony proves to be truly lasting. ,

Here again the severer critics and writers perhaps tend to exaggerate when they condemn such pictures wholesale. The pictures are not truly great and the uninformed man who asserts dogmatically that he knows what he likes, that he likes such pictures, and asks for nothing better, is being absurd. But that is no reason to turn them out of the galleries. They have their



value ; the essential is to realize clearly what that value really is, and not to exaggerate it.

The same canons of judgement also have regard to another class of picture, those which could never hope to find a place in a public gallery at all.<sup>o</sup> Such are the works of minor painters of the past, which may form the nucleus of the smaller private collections of today, or those of amateur painters of the present who paint for their own enjoyment or for the pleasure of their friends, but who do not seek or expect any public recognition. There is a great joy in possession, and in addition a great deal can be learnt about the works of the great men by studying closely those of the minor ones. And there is an even more intense joy in creation, which is not only a delight and satisfaction in itself, but also serves to show how intensely difficult are the problems which the great masters seem to solve so easily, the problems of line and drawing, of composition and of colour harmony. Apart from the joy they give to the creator, amateur work thus enables the student to learn by actual practice many things which he could never learn by purely theoretical study. The formation of collections of minor works by enthusiasts or the production of paintings by amateurs are thus highly important and valuable activities. They only become intolerable to others when the owners of pictures become so obsessed with what they possess or the painters with what they are doing that they become incapable of realizing true quality elsewhere.

In opposition to all these classes of works of art, which are in one way or another good, though the quality may vary in degree, are those that are frankly bad. Some are bad because of lack of competence on the part of the artist. This is easily discernible ; and no more needs to be said about them. But others are bad for other reasons, and are more dangerous because such works of art often tend to appeal to the observer, for the same reasons as the popular type of picture discussed above. The popular pictures are, however, honest, though they may be limited in scope, whereas the

pictures of this other class are frankly dishonest. Either they are fakes, produced with the definite intention of deceiving, or they exploit a sentimental subject and a spurious antiquarianism in order to enhance their appeal. Pictures of this latter class are often to be found in middle-class restaurants or in the windows of semi-fashionable shops. They are produced on a more or less wholesale basis, by artists who are competent technically but who have absolutely nothing to say. These men may not always be charlatans, but if they are not, they lack the capacity to develop ideas of their own. Such works not only lack soul and spirit, but are also false to the core. And though a competent fake calls for a very high degree of craftsmanship, it can never be classed as a work of art, for a work of art is above anything else a living thing, having its own existence and its own being, and it cannot be an imitation, still less an imitation executed with the intent to deceive. But, as the eye becomes trained, quality becomes more easily recognizable, and standards are set up in the mind. It is through these standards that a new and unfailing source of delight is acquired, which will remain with one for the whole of life.

## CHAPTER VI

### HOW TO LOOK AT PICTURES

**I**N previous chapters the questions of why art has been produced, why pictures have been painted, and why we should look at them have been examined. It is now time to try to give a few hints as to how painting can best be looked at in order to draw the maximum enjoyment and obtain the best value from it.

Perhaps the first essential is to come to the picture with an open mind, that is to say, to banish as far as possible any preconceived ideas, such as a prejudice against work of a particular period or country, dislike of a specific type of subject matter, or refusal to consider work unless in a favourite medium. Of course this is not always possible, or indeed, desirable, for many people go to a gallery with a set objective in their minds, to study Flemish painting, shall we say, or to examine in as great detail as possible the work of some particular artist. But the man who comes to a gallery without some such preconceived idea cannot do better than allow himself to relax mentally, so that his sensations are laid open to receive the impact of what the artist has to convey. Just as, if he goes to a concert, the amateur of music will obviously keep silent, so that he may absorb the effect of the music, so when entering a gallery the amateur of art should try to banish other ideas from his mind, so that he will be open to receive the impression of its paintings.

As he moves along through the rooms—looking at the pictures rather than burying his head in the catalogue—he will sooner or later encounter one that strikes a sympathetic chord, and he will wish to stop for a time in front of it. Apart from its subject matter, about which something has already been said, what should he then look for? Where should he direct his gaze, and how direct his attention? These are questions which

certainly occur to the amateur spectator and the reader of such a book as this may hope to find them answered in its pages.

Let us suppose that the picture is Rubens' "Rainbow" landscape in the Wallace Collection (Pl. 13). Perhaps the first thing that strikes the observer in a picture like this is its colour harmony, how each colour blends with its neighbour, but also interacts with it to produce a definite atmosphere of quiet, gentle calm. It is a soft, warm evening that is shown in the picture, and there is nothing violent in its atmosphere, so that there is also nothing strident or harsh about the colour. The noise of the thunder and the flash of the lightning have passed, leaving the beauty of the rainbow behind them. The loveliness of this atmosphere is reflected in the colouring. Colour can be used very subtly to enhance the atmosphere of the subject matter. Lurid lights, with a dominance of red, for example, suggest a scene of violence and horror, or brilliant, rather strident, tones automatically go with one of violent action or strong emotion. But though the colours of the Rubens are as fresh and varied as can be, there is nothing of harshness; all is calm and gentleness.

The actual nature of the colouring of a picture cannot, of course, be gauged from a monochrome reproduction. But a photograph or plate in a book does serve to show the system of colour distribution, and the area of the picture that is left to a greater or lesser extent in shadow as opposed to that which is light gives a pretty clear indication of the atmosphere of the picture, if not of the actual shades. A greater mass of dark thus suggests not only a dim picture, but also a quiet, restful subject, while a picture which is all high light is likely to be one in which vivid action or movement is taking place, though the movement may be purely figurative and abstract rather than actual.

In close association with the colours goes the nature of the composition. In fact, the colour arrangement is really a part of the basis of the composition, for it is by means of the colour that the composition is usually

built up. Sometimes a painting may be little more than a tinted drawing, as we see in the work of some of the primitives. But in more sophisticated paintings colour and drawing are often virtually inseparable, and sometimes the painter composes his picture directly in colour, without any preliminary sketch in outline. The strangely moving compositions of El Greco, for example, are built up in this way, and the colour and form of his work are quite inseparable one from the other.

In the composition of our Rubens there is nothing harsh and nothing angular, just as there are no strident notes in the colouring. The forms are soft and rounded. The edge of the road, the bank of the stream, the side of the wood ; all curve gently towards the middle background; while the lovely curve of the rainbow spans the sky above. Somehow all these shapes help to bear out the character of the scene. The figures are at one with the background, the background with the figures, and the two horses pulling the cart on the left or the group of cattle are absolute essentials of the composition as a whole.

It is interesting to contrast with this composition of subtle forms and gentle curves that of Bruegel's "Massacre of the Innocents" (Pl. 12). Here men, horses, houses or trees are all clear cut and angular, and all go together to make up a pattern which is almost geometric. The nature of this pattern goes a very long way towards expressing the emotion as well as the atmosphere of the scene. Analyse the composition further, and it becomes apparent that the field of action is contained within a flattened circle, which is marked by the edge of the pond and the hind legs of the horses in the foreground and the group of lancers at the back. This flattened circle as a shape serves admirably to convey the rather gloomy effect that Bruegel sought. With great depth of perception he does not stage his scene in the summer, but in mid-winter, and thanks to the character of his composition, the emotion of the theme is somehow deadened, so that it is not one of

blatant horror. The depiction of horror for its own sake has seldom been effective in art. Undiluted it is something which does not lend itself to painting, for the human mind just cannot assimilate it. Here, on the other hand, one senses somehow that the cries of anguish are heard at a distance, and the tone of emotion is, as it were, depressed. It is not loudly proclaimed, which is always a disagreeable experience, but it is dulled, and in the dulling it is also intensified and made more permanent. It is not like a scream, once heard and quickly forgotten, but like a dull agony, long drawn out. The painter here achieves this effect purely by painterly means. The leaden sky in the background, betokening a further fall of snow, the frozen pool in the foreground, the curiously ominous array of lances in the middle distance ; there is nothing in these that is outside the province of painting, but how effective each detail is, and how well it serves to enhance the general atmosphere of the picture !

Another feature that is clearly obvious in the Bruegel is that nothing in the picture is redundant, yet nothing could be omitted as far as the composition is concerned. The concentration of the action in the front part of the picture is particularly telling ; an additional figure behind the group of lancers would not only lessen the drama, but also ruin the picture. Nor could a single one of the figures in the foreground be eliminated. Try to cut out the horseman and the dog in the left-hand corner, and the composition of the picture at once becomes too obvious a circle, so that the eye travels uneasily round and round. Put an additional figure in the lower right-hand corner, or cut out the two tree-stumps, the rider, and the men battering at a door, and the oval of the composition is lost and the picture loses much of its meaning. Similarly none of the trees, houses, or other groups could be omitted without destroying the balance, nor could a figure be added.

How important a thing is composition is perhaps more clearly shown if we compare the two pictures illustrated side by side on Plate 18. The one, perhaps by Hogarth,

is brilliantly conceived and most effectively lit and painted. The great sweeping curve of the front bench furnishes an admirable basis, and the actual shape of the curve is something effective and stimulating in itself. But it further serves to draw the attention of the observer to the model, without detracting from the importance of the background or the rows of students. The arrangement of light in the background further serves to build up the rhythm of the composition. The texture of the flesh and the curved form of the model, for example, are most admirably compensated by the statue on the opposite side. Remove the statue, and the picture at once loses its balance.

Contrast with this the picture by Zoffany of a similar subject illustrated on the same plate. Its inferiority as a composition is at once apparent. Much too much attention is paid to detail and in order to stress this rhythm is sacrificed, and as a result the painting has no unity. It is just a series of collected portraits or studies, each undoubtedly interesting in itself, but each at the same time completely unconnected with the other. It is a pleasant record of the physiognomies and characteristics of a number of outstanding individuals, and as such it is interesting and valuable, but it quite definitely does not constitute a picture of importance on purely artistic or æsthetic grounds.

Colour and composition, which are really inseparable in a painting of quality, for they cannot be out of tune one with another, are the first essentials that must concern us in the contemplation of a picture when we look at it as a work of art, and the further we examine, the more essential does composition appear. Without it a picture of necessity lacks life, and becomes no more than a record of fact. As such it may interest us, but it cannot move us deeply, and certainly cannot stimulate in us an experience which is æsthetic in character.

It so happens that the basis of the composition of the pictures that we have examined so far has consisted mainly of curves. Rubens almost invariably composed his pictures on the basis of spiral or circles, and

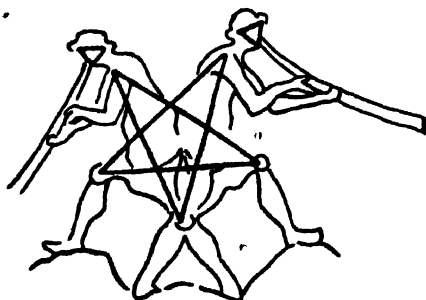
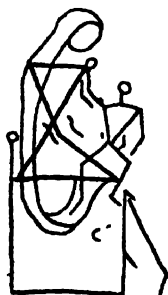
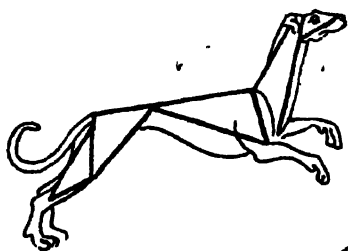


FIG. 3.—Villard de Honencourt. Studies in Composition.



Bruegel very frequently did so, though they are less obviously marked. The reason why this form was preferred by them, and by many other painters too, was probably in order to achieve an effect of movement. Just as the circle has movement, and is a dynamic rather than a static form, so pictures based upon it have movement, and with movement comes life. Hogarth, though not perhaps so addicted to the circle, made very frequent use of a curved line in his compositions, and in his later life went so far as to write a book in which he set out to prove that true beauty was only possible when a curved line was used. The ideal shape for him was provided by a piece of wire, which had been wound round a cone, starting at the top and ending at the bottom, directly below the starting-point. This provided, he thought, the best basis for composition in three dimensions, and when flattened into two dimensions it became what he termed "the line of beauty and grace". In a curious yet profound frontispiece which he designed specially for the book,<sup>1</sup> he drew out a series of examples to illustrate his point, comprising such things as banister rails, candlesticks, architectural mouldings, ladies' stays, or even human faces; some are too straight, and therefore ugly, others too rounded, and therefore unattractive; in the most effective form for each of his examples there is a subtle balance which approximates to his ideal curved line.

The circle or curve is however not by any means the only possible basis for good composition, and other painters have often preferred to make use of angular patterns or more severe geometric shapes. In an interesting sketch book left by the Gothic architect Villard de Honnencourt human and animal figures are thus shown, all reduced to rectangular or triangular forms (Fig. 3), and larger compositions, wherein groups of figures appear, are treated in the same way. And in more recent times Cézanne based his compositions on similar angular forms. In his view of Pontoise illustrated on Plate 22 (b) this is clearly obvious, for every

<sup>1</sup> *The Analysis of Beauty*, London, 1753.

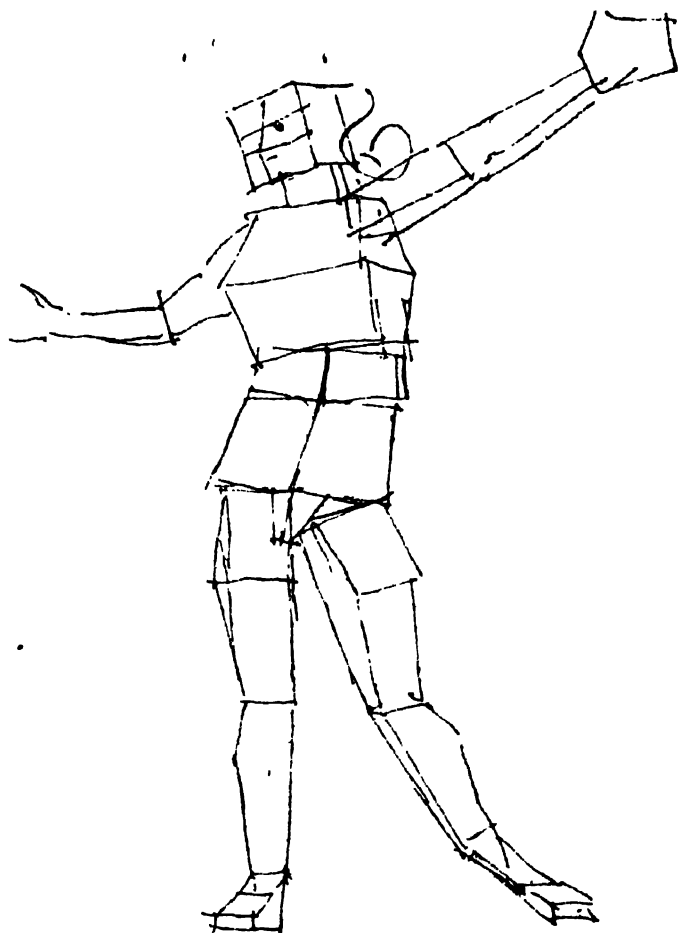


FIG. 4.—Dürer. Study in Composition.

shape in the picture is either a rectangle or a triangle, and the whole picture is built up on that basis. The effect produced is one of severity and reticence, as opposed to the gentle serenity of Rubens' picture. Cézanne's painting is essentially formal and static; the spectator's eye comes to rest, and remains at rest, satisfied with the completeness of what is before it. Nothing could be added to, nothing taken away from this picture, for each form is complete in itself. Imagine for a moment that the three human figures which are included in Pissarro's rendering of the same subject are standing in the street of Cézanne's painting; the picture at once loses something of its sublimity and calm; it becomes fussy, and is spoilt. Remove the figures, especially that of the woman with the black skirt, from the Pissarro, and the canvas at once loses something of its balance.

In addition to the circular and triangular forms we have been examining so far, other painters have preferred cylinders or cubes. This was the case with Dürer, and in his sketch books there are studies where the human form is reduced to a cubic basis; that is to say, even though shown only in two dimensions, the figures that appear are obviously conceived as in three; they are cubic forms, not rectangles or squares (Fig. 4). In finishing off his pictures these basic forms were obscured by Dürer by the addition of superficial details, such as clothing, hair, facial characteristics, and so on. But the basic cubic form is there, none the less, and must be there in all painting of quality. The "cubist" painters of recent times go rather further than did Dürer, for they omit the superficial detail in the finished work, and leave the cubes—and little but the cubes—for us to look at. The paintings of William Roberts, who prefers cylindrical forms, may be noted in this connection in this country, and those of Bracque, who prefers angular cubes, in France.

In his later work Michelangelo made considerable use of the curved line; indeed, something like Hogarth's three-dimensional curve must have served as the basis

for much of his work, for he sought, especially in the Sistine ceiling, to achieve three-dimensional effects in this way (Pl. 8). His aim in such a work as that illustrated here was to give a sculptural, three-dimensional appearance to his figures, suggesting by various subtle means the effect of recession into the depths of the background or projection forwards beyond the surface of the picture. It remained for the baroque artists of the next generations to exaggerate this idea into what was to become veritable illusion or deception, usually known by the French term "trompe l'œil". In some of his earlier work, however, Michelangelo made greater use of angular forms, as in the picture of the Entombment in the National Gallery in London, which is almost certainly to be attributed to him (Pl. 9 (b)). It is possible that he was influenced by Van der Weyden in this case; he may even have been copying, more or less freely, the picture by Van der Weyden which is illustrated beside it and which is now in the Uffizi at Florence.

However representational a picture may be, and whatever its subject, this element of composition will have a vital part to play, and the quality of the picture will depend to a great extent on how good the composition is. This is true irrespective of date or period. It is as essential in very early work as it is in the most modern. The element of composition is there in the wall painting from the Catacombs illustrated in Plate 4, for the two figures serve to balance one another very effectively; they are not just two figures without any relationship one to the other. The same element is there in the Picasso shown on Plate 23. Here subject matter has practically no part to play, and there is certainly no story. Representation has, in fact, been sacrificed to composition, pure and unadulterated.

The ultimate basis of the composition of this Picasso picture is of a very interesting character. It is not based on a circular movement, as was the Bruegel, nor on a curved line, or even on cylindrical or cubic shapes. When analysed to its basic form, it appears as a theme

of age old sanctity, for it is no more than the confronting of two identical or closely similar objects, with a central motif between them. In the art of ancient Mesopotamia the theme was given the guise of a God in human form in the centre, strangling a beast on either side of him. In Persia there was usually a lion or bird on either side, with the "hom" or symbol of life between. In the Byzantine world there was usually a vase in the centre, between scrolls of acanthus or vine leaves, balancing one another on either side. In Picasso's picture the head and the vase of flowers take the place of the scroll or beast, and the strongly marked centre line takes on the role of the God, the vase, or the symbol of life. If the Picasso is looked at through half-closed eyes, this simple basic theme is at once obvious. The other elements in the composition, knife, mug, grapes or tray, are of a subsidiary character, just as the figures in the Bruegel were in a way subsidiary to the main axis of rhythm. But once again, each detail is essential, and if the knife, one of the horns of the head, or one of the flowers in the vase is removed, the picture at once becomes incomplete. Nor again could anything be added without destroying the balance.

The actual appearance of this picture, however, is perhaps not very easy to understand at first sight, for Picasso is experimenting with problems of breaking up form in much the same way that the Impressionist painters were experimenting with those of breaking up light. But if the picture is looked at purely as a composition, something of the artist's aim will surely become apparent, and the work will impress or attract, even if the nature of its subject matter seem strange, and it will do this more readily if seen in colour, for the colours not only bear out the nature of the composition, but are also extremely fresh and attractive in themselves. There is a good coloured plate of the picture in Miss Gertrude Stein's book on Picasso (Batsford, 1938, Pl. 61).

As stated elsewhere in this book, the business of explaining how to look at a picture is not an easy one.

But the first essential is to analyse the composition, in an effort to discover how the picture is built up. The next is probably to study the colour, and see how the artist uses it to back up the form or to create an atmosphere. If those two things are done, the spectator will have progressed a long way along the route of learning how to look. It is hoped that the brief analysis given here to two or three pictures may facilitate his progress. There is little more that can be said, except that such things as the subject matter of the picture, the details of the figures or the romance of the setting have in reality a smaller part to play in making a great picture than have composition and colour, and it is quite possible to produce a perfectly good painting without actual figures, naturalistic detail or obvious subject matter. These things in themselves are not necessarily bad, as some modern critics tend to suggest, but they are not really essential to good art. They may well add to the interest or charm of a picture, but without composition to form a basis, a picture in which they preponderate tends to become a mere record of something else, and not a thing with a life of its own. And the artist's real job is to give life, not just to record it.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE VALUE OF REPRESENTATION IN ART

NEARLY all the art with which we are most familiar is of an essentially representational character, that is to say, the artist has observed some object, animal, person or landscape, and has sought to render on his panel, canvas or wall or to carve out of wood or stone a true delineation of what he has seen. At the same time, however, he has endeavoured to express the essence of the animal, the person, the landscape or even the object, so that it becomes something living and vital in itself. It is for this reason that art, though it may be less accurate than, is also immeasurably superior to, photography, for though the camera may reproduce the appearance exactly enough, it is quite powerless to express the soul or spirit of the subject. All representational art, on the other hand, has this dual character, though artists have of course varied in their capacity both in the sphere of representation and in that of giving expression. It was so in Palæolithic times, for, as we have seen, the paintings of Lascaux or Altamira were astonishingly successful, not only in showing us what each particular animal looked like, but also in expressing the character of that animal. One may compare with these early paintings such works as Dürer's lovely drawing of a hare (Pl. 7), Leonardo's sketches of horses, or Rembrandt's etchings of lions and elephants. These, like the Palæolithic paintings, provide clear, precise and exact representations, but at the same time express with amazing vividness the whole spirit of the animal they portray. No one could possibly criticize these works because they are not "like", nor approaching from the opposite angle, could anyone dismiss them as trivial because they lack spirit, as some things that are painstakingly accurate tend to do.

Many other painters, however, whose work no one would find difficult to understand or appreciate, have taken rather greater liberties in rendering the actual appearance of their subject in order to give it vividness and meaning. 'Michelangelo, for example, tended to exaggerate the muscles and play tricks with the proportions of his figures in order to achieve a three-dimensional, sculpturesque effect. The figures of his Sistine ceiling, for example, are thus quite inaccurate if judged from the viewpoint of the photograph (Pl. 8), though they are tremendously vigorous and express energy and strength in every line. Botticelli, again, exaggerated the proportions of his figures in order to achieve the rather ethereal effects he desired, though in his work the figures are made taller and more slender than in nature so as to give an impression of delicate grace and mystic contemplation. Even the great Greek sculptors of the classical period, like Praxiteles, took liberties with natural forms, and in order to produce an ideal type of human figure often combined something of the vigour of the male and the subtle gentleness of the female in a single statue.

Other artists, whose work is generally accepted as of outstanding quality, though the layman may at first find difficulty in appreciating it, permitted themselves even further liberties. El Greco thus elongated his figures very considerably ; in his later work this was sometimes done to an almost extreme degree. The central figure in his painting of the Assumption of the Virgin in the church of St. Vicente at Toledo is, for example, most curiously proportioned (Pl. 15) according to purely academic concepts of drawing, and critics have even sought to explain the proportions of such figures by suggesting that the painter suffered from astigmatism. Yet the figures were not shown in this way because El Greco was incapable of accurate drawing—the precisely drawn flowers at the bottom of the picture discount at once any such possibility—but because it seemed to him that these particular exaggerations served to increase the spirituality of his painting



and to enhance the atmosphere of the divine which properly belongs to the scene.

Constable, in some of his oils, resorted to rather similar exaggerations, and though he always asserted that the true interpretation of nature was his principal aim in painting, many of his contemporaries found that he took too great liberties with his colours; of one of his landscapes a contemporary critic wrote that it would have been all right if someone had not splashed whitewash all over it. He was, of course, referring to Constable's habit of using flake white for highlights to give the picture greater freshness and brilliance. And Turner went even further than Constable, for he became so obsessed with the problem of painting light, more especially the hazy, foggy light of an early autumn morning, that in some of his later works he almost forsook the representation of actual objects. His "Rain, Steam and Speed" or his "Interior at Petworth", for example, are two of the most delicate symphonies of colour that have ever been painted, but it is pointless to reproduce them in monochrome, for there is practically nothing but the colour symphony to reproduce. Here Turner concentrated on expressing the spirit of the scene rather than on reproducing it exactly, and since his day painters have tended to do this more and more. Cézanne even went so far as to confess his dislike of any very exact representation of the subject, for he criticized Rosa Bonheur's work for being "so horribly like". But even in his most severely exaggerated and stylized paintings, Cézanne's aim was still the reproduction of natural form, though he selected and simplified the forms to an almost extreme degree.

In recent years, however, artists have tended to go even further and have disclaimed the importance of any representation at all. This, however, as has already been hinted in the preceding chapters, is nothing completely new. Man, in the course of his long history, has lived and thought in a variety of different ways, and his art has not by any means always been closely tied to nature. Even in the Palæolithic period, when

such superb paintings and sculptures were being produced in the representational vein, walls and portable objects of one sort or another were also being decorated with patterns of an ornamental character, where lines, circles and spirals were the only motifs present, and

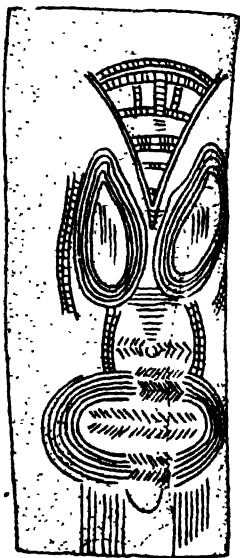


FIG. 5.- Engraving on Ivory from Predmost, Austria. Palæolithic.

where naturalistic forms were either severely stylized or completely absent; an engraving on ivory from Predmost in Austria may be noted as an example (Fig. 5). At first glance it looks like a doodle of various lines, but closer examination shows it to be a very stylized rendering of a woman's figure.

Art of this type was to become wellnigh universal in the next phase of the world's culture, the Neolithic. Indeed, up to now no works of a purely representational character have been found on Neolithic sites or in association with Neolithic implements. Instead, the art was wholly based on formal pattern, some of it fairly simple, like the Predmost figure, but some of it very complicated.

At New Grange in Ireland, for example, a series of spirals are engraved upon the rock, which may have had some symbolical meaning in their own time though no such meaning is apparent today (Fig. 6). But they have a certain æsthetic significance, for they are not just pointless curves, but, like the beats of the drum in primitive music, or even in jazz, they have a rhythmical quality which is in itself quite stimulating and quite expressive. There is, it is true, none of the elaborate composition and harmony of a great symphony, or a great representational picture, but still in

their own way these curves and spirals are works of art. They are expressive of movement, they are intriguing and stimulating. Further, their purpose is not primarily utilitarian, and they awake emotions in the spectator which succeed, for a time at least, in transporting him away from himself into a world of the imagination.

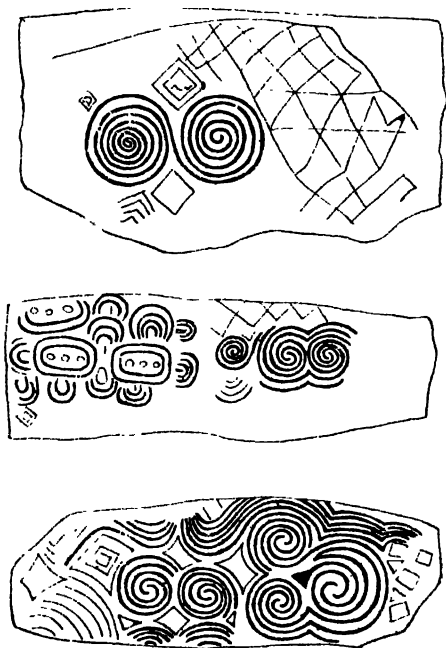


FIG. 6.—Carvings on Rocks, New Grange, Ireland. Neolithic.

Though it is primarily associated with primitive cultures, art of this type, where pattern and rhythm are the essential components, was to appear again in several more developed phases of man's history, most notably in Scandinavia and Britain between the fifth and the tenth centuries A.D., when the style that we know as Celtic was to the fore. Numerous pieces of metal-work of the pagan age and even stone crosses set up by

Christians thus bear elaborate spiral or interlacing patterns as their sole ornament, and superb manuscripts like the "Book of Lindisfarne" or the "Book of Kells" contain miniatures which are just as formal and as stylized as the motifs upon the carved stones. Enhanced by a very rich selection of colours, however, the manuscripts appear finer and the skill of their illuminators was on the whole much greater than that of the contemporary sculptors. A page from the "Book of Lindisfarne" may serve as an example (Pl. 5). The basis of the pattern was sometimes purely geometric, no use whatever being made of living forms: at other times, though the whole conception was equally formal, the motifs of the design were based on birds or animals. Though the production of pure pattern was clearly the main concern of the artist, a close analysis shows that many of the interlacing patterns shown in the illustration are actually made up of animals, something like greyhounds, or curious long-necked birds, though their bodies and limbs have been elongated and contorted almost beyond recognition.

Very similar stylizations of animal or bird forms is to be found on early Greek pottery of the style known as "geometric", as well as on early pottery from Persia, Syria, China and elsewhere. The vase illustrated in Fig. 1, which has already been discussed, may serve to stress this point. The stylization is not perhaps quite as extreme as in the Celtic examples, but the approach is the same, and rhythm was the artist's main pre-occupation in both. In the case of such examples where animal forms constitute the basis of the ornament, it has sometimes been held that we have to do with a decadent naturalistic art. But the art is in its own way so effective that it cannot be regarded as decadent. It is, however, not very easy to determine in what way the artist actually conceived his design, that is to say, to be sure whether he realized that his ornamental forms were really zoomorphic, and stylized them on purpose, or whether he drew them as patterns, without paying much attention to the fact that they were based

on living forms. Some of the dog-like animals so popular in Celtic art, for example, are so stylized that they are almost unrecognizable as living forms, and the same is true of many of the motifs prevalent in Greek geometric pottery. It is only after comparison with other examples which are less extreme that one realizes that the frieze at the top of the Susa cup is really a procession of long-legged and long-necked birds like cranes, and not just a formal pattern. In a rather similar way the folds of costume were sometimes treated purely as rhythmical patterns, without any attempt to achieve modelling, as for example on a great deal of Romanesque sculpture (Fig. 2). Though from the representational point of view the results are inaccurate, they are none the less effective and expressive.

Art of this type differs from the representational art of Palaeolithic times in a number of ways. Firstly, it is usually small in scale, being generally confined to the adornment of pots, pieces of metal, or at a later stage, the pages of books. Secondly it is usually in the form of an ornament added to some sort of utilitarian object, and does not have an independent existence of its own, like a painting on a wall or a piece of free-standing sculpture. Indeed, except in the case of Romanesque sculpture, art of this type is ill suited for use on a large scale, and it is impossible to conceive of panels, still less of great wall paintings, the subject of which was confined to a rhythmical composition such as those we see on the Susa vase or in the Lindisfarne Gospels. In this respect this type of art is certainly less ambitious and less imposing than figural art. But the pot from Susa is none the less essentially a work of art, as fine in its own way as a piece of the rarest Chinese pottery or a vase of Italian majolica. The creative spirit apparent in the design removes it beyond all question from the category of mere craft, where there is skill, but no interpretation and little creation.

At a very early stage in man's history, then, we see two divisions in art manifesting themselves, the one essentially naturalistic, the other abstract. In the

former the artist sought to reproduce what he saw before him. His approach was visual, through the eye, and his purpose was to render on a wall or panel, or in sculpture, as true, and at the same time as vivid, an impression of what he saw as possible. The other type of art was cerebral rather than visual; the artist divorced himself from living forms almost entirely, and produced rhythmic patterns and designs --or, if he used naturalistic models, he stylized them so much that the original appearance was often lost completely.

This diversity of approach has continued since Neolithic times. Sometimes artists have been mainly concerned with reproducing nature, and their works have been judged primarily on the grounds of their ability to do so with success. At other times they have been mainly concerned with creating compositions out of their own heads, and their products have been judged on whether or not what they created was effective. Today we seem to stand on the brink between the two phases. Some of our art is primarily naturalistic and it is that which is most readily appreciated by the layman. But some of it is completely and purely abstract, and has no connection with living models at all; it is that art that tends to appeal to the more intellectual and more advanced critics of the day, as well as to the artists themselves, for they have moved more quickly away from the conservatism of representation than has the public.

In addition to art of one extreme or the other, however, there have at many phases of the world's history been attempts to equate the two ideas, the concept of vision and the concept of apprehension, and certain conventions or oddities of the art of the ancient world may be explained as the result of a failure to determine which guiding star should be followed, that of what was actually seen, or that of what was known to exist. The sculptors of Assyria, for instance, employed a curious convention in executing the reliefs of the great winged bulls which were erected at Nineveh and elsewhere. The monsters are fabulous and their appearance is something conceived in the mind rather than known to

nature, for they have bulls' bodies, with wings and human heads. But the details of the figures are all essentially naturalistic, and indeed are executed with the closest attention to the living model. They show indeed the very clearest powers of observation. An even more curious combination of realized idea and actual vision appears in the rendering of the legs of these monsters. Thus when seen from the front, the beasts have two legs, firmly planted side by side, and when seen from the side they have four legs, shown in pairs, as if the beast were walking forward. A half view, however, discloses five legs, two at the front and three at the side, one of the legs having been shown twice, to satisfy what was known to be there both in a complete side and a complete front view. There is a strange lack of coherence here between the precise naturalism of the details and this strange convention of delineation.

A similar convention dominated the reproduction of the human form in the whole of Egyptian art from earliest dynastic times down to the Hellenistic conquest. Animals were depicted naturally and with great effect, and though the artists usually preferred to show them side face, they were quite capable of showing them full face or even half face if necessary. But in depicting the human figure the legs, head and hips were invariably shown side face and the shoulders full face. This can hardly have been due to lack of technical competence. The artists were possessed of very great skill, and would surely have been capable of painting the whole body side face, full face or even half face, had they been required to do so; indeed, persons were shown often enough in completely naturalistic positions in sculpture, especially that on a small scale. The convention followed in the paintings must have arisen as the result of some failure to equate what was actually seen by the painter with what he knew to be there. We have seen a somewhat similar experiment in recent years in certain of Picasso's pictures, where he shows a face in side view, but paints in both eyes. Like the Egyptian artist, he was painting not what he saw, but what he knew, not

a vision but an idea. The principal difference between his work and the Egyptian is that he has an avowed purpose in doing what he did, whereas the Egyptian had failed to carry the analysis of naturalistic representation to its ultimate conclusions.

The arts of the ancient world were to a great extent dominated by conventions of one sort or another, which survived over astonishingly long periods with incredibly little variation, and it was only at times that work of a purely naturalistic or a purely abstract character was produced. In Greece, however, there was a sudden and very rapid development towards naturalism and in a few centuries, almost in a few decades, a greater change took place than had previously been accomplished in many thousands of years. About 600 B.C. statues were still being produced in a formal, stylized attitude, with the arms parallel with the body, and with one leg slightly in advance of the other, in much the same attitude that had predominated in ancient Egypt for four thousand years. But by about 500 B.C. a new lightness and naturalism had come in, and by about 450 the variety of attitudes commonly taken up were wellnigh as numerous as the variety of poses of which the human body is capable. Never, since Palæolithic times, had art been so governed by naturalism and by so essentially visual an outlook.

When once set upon this course of naturalism and variety, the artists tended to let representation become a fetish. We read that Apelles painted grapes in so lifelike a manner that the birds came to peck at his paintings, and very soon this idea of imitating nature began to obtrude to an exaggerated degree. Anything that served to recall the actual came to be revered, and other rules and aims were set aside. Sculptors thus sought to give to their statues a greater semblance to life, by painting in the features in colour, or even by adding such details as eyebrows of actual hair, or else they concentrated all their efforts on the expression of emotion. Exaggerated gestures, violent expressions, agitated movements, were all resorted to as means of



achieving vividness, and the results, as at other times in the world's history when aims of an extreme character have predominated, were not very successful. Art and nature are two different things, and when the artist absorbs himself in an attempt to imitate nature's more violent movements, his work tends to lose a great deal of its intrinsic character. Pure abstraction takes us perhaps too far in one direction, but pure imitation, where realism is the only guide, certainly goes too far in the other. The artist is essentially a creator, not a copyist, and whatever external reasons may be sought to explain the existence of his work—to serve the medicine man, to decorate a pot, to provide a cult statue or to glorify the actions of a monarch—he has always been a creator at the same time. When he descends to mere imitation, decadence is close at hand.

This decadence of style in late classical times went hand in hand with decadence of subject matter. The brutal gladiators, the scenes of sexual orgies and similar subjects that we find in much Roman art of the first two centuries of the Christian era not only belong to a decadent phase of art, but also to a decadent phase of culture. But just as extreme abstract art today is found beside that of a representational character, so in the Roman world other and more healthy trends were apparent even at the most decadent phases of the Empire. Much Roman art was indeed of very great significance. New and progressive ideas were on the march, and even the passion for realism produced one outstanding and extremely important result, namely the rise of portraiture. Later Roman portraiture both in sculpture and painting excelled in its own way almost as much as did Greek art in another direction. In the latter the subject matter was mainly based on the human form idealized as the model for the divine; in the former the approach was more prosaic and of a more limited character, and the works lacked the poetry of the art of Greece, even if they achieved the perfection of great prose.

If late classical art tended too strongly towards an excess of naturalism, the next phase in the art of our

Western world tended once more towards stylization and abstraction. Such a tendency was no doubt inevitable, unless art was to remain static as it did in Egypt, for the pendulum always tends to swing from one extreme to the other. But the change was accelerated by external factors, the most influential of which was the adoption of the new faith of Christianity as the state religion. In the classical world God had been formed in man's image; man himself seemed capable of perfection, and his highest thoughts found expression in finite works, like the Parthenon at Athens, which had reached the ultimate end possible for such an architectural conception. In this building, or indeed in the statues of the greatest Greek sculptors, perfection had been reached; in each particular style the apex seemed to have been reached.

The Christian faith, on the other hand, did not permit of such concepts. Perfection was not of man but of God, and God was conceived not as something finite and accessible in this world, but essentially as something infinite and of the world to come. The artist who served the Christian Church had to turn once more to abstraction, to the expression of an idea rather than to straightforward representation, and the very great changes that took place in the development of art between about A.D. 300 and 600 show the influence of the new thought as well as the inevitable results of change induced by a progress away from the decadence of exaggerated naturalism. The character and nature of Christian art until the Renaissance—for Early Christian art and mediæval art constitute a unity from the æsthetic point of view—will be discussed in another place. Here it suffices to stress the essentially abstract basis of this art, whether it took the form of a Byzantine mosaic or a Romanesque sculpture (Fig. 2). It owed of course a very great debt to what had gone before in Rome, Greece and the East, but in essence the new art contrasted completely with the realistic outlook of Rome or the naturalistic art of Greece.

When once the new Christian art had been established,

about the sixth century, a very distinctive iconography, that is, a system governing the choice of subject matter and the arrangement of figures in each scene, was soon developed, and closely set forms were followed for almost a thousand years. Until about 1400 the Church was a strict master. But with the coming of the Renaissance, a curiously close parallel in development took place to that enacted in Greece almost two thousand years before, and the sudden changes that came about in Italy between about 1420 and 1520 were hardly less striking than the changes that took place in Greece in the fifth century B.C. Once more the swing was towards naturalism, and the severe rules of Byzantine art were rapidly cast aside. But once more after a time pure naturalism tended to disintegrate into excessive realism as it had in the Hellenistic period, and a search for emotion became just as characteristic of the work of such painters as the Carracci as it had in that of masters of the first century B.C. But degeneracy was never as complete as in the classical world, nor was there any rapid reversion to a new manner as there had been with the foundation of Byzantium about the year 330. Instead a series of great individuals—Titian, Rubens, Velazquez, Rembrandt and others—maintained the standard at an extremely high level, each exercising an influence on the development of art owing to the power of his own personality and the originality of his individual style.

The phase of art in western Europe from the fifteenth century onwards was above anything else an age of individuals. Never before in the world's history so far as we can tell had they counted for so much, except perhaps in China, where the great masters had given their names to firmly established styles from the early years of the Christian era onwards. Indeed, as we look back at the age of the Renaissance in western Europe it is primarily the names that stand out. We do not think of a particular building like the Parthenon, or of a particular statue like the Charioteer of Delphi, or of particular paintings or mosaics like those in San Vitale at Ravenna, but of the men who produced the great works,

like Bramante, Michelangelo, Raphael or Masaccio. The personality of the individual becomes one of the governing factors of art, so that it is impossible to think of, still less to study, art without first of all thinking of the great names. And even the little names are so important, that there is sometimes a tendency almost to forget the actual art, and instead to become obsessed with the names and with the problems of the attribution of pictures and the identification of minor painters. This business of searching out the masters is, no doubt, an enthralling study in itself, yet one must not forget that the great men sometimes nodded, and that there are also many outstanding works of art that can never be associated with a name. Ultimately it is the work itself that matters, not the name, and this book is primarily intended as a guide to the appreciation of works of art, rather than as a guide to the names and styles of the artists who were responsible for producing them.

Until the last decade or so, the names have invariably been associated with works of a naturalistic character, for the abstract art of the past has remained anonymous. But the fact that we are producing works of an abstract character just now gives a particular interest to earlier manifestations in that manner. The abstract style, as we have shown, is nothing new ; what is new is that the abstract artists now sign their works. Abstract art, in fact, is no longer primarily decorative. It has taken upon itself the task of expressing and interpreting man's most inmost thoughts. This is no easy task, for man's thoughts are complicated, and as our powers of analysing them progress, their complication becomes more and more apparent. But it is the task that the artists have set themselves, and it is a task that has never before been undertaken in art. Whether it is a legitimate task for the artist is a question that will be discussed further on. Here it is necessary only to indicate its nature, and to show how the abstract art of today is on the one hand nothing new, but on the other, contrasts with all the abstract art of the past in the wider philosophical scope which it embraces.

## CHAPTER VIII

# THE GREAT STYLES OF EUROPEAN ART

**T**HOUGH it is hoped that the foregoing chapters will afford food for thought and also serve as guide posts pointing to possible lines of approach towards the study of art, the most useful assistance that any book can give is undoubtedly in the way of providing information of an historical character. What was done at what periods? What were the aims of the artists in doing it? What features help us to distinguish these periods and artists as we look back at the work associated with them? These are questions which every spectator asks, and which we may legitimately expect to find answered at least superficially in a book of this nature.

It is of course impossible to write here a full history of European art, still less of the art of the world as a whole. To include sections on Chinese painting, Buddhist sculpture, or Islamic decoration—to mention but three of the numerous important chapters of the history of art outside Europe—would be to extend the scope of this book unduly. But a brief survey of the major groups of painting in Europe in Christian times may be attempted, though it must be stressed that it is no more than an introduction, and those who are interested are advised to turn to some of the books mentioned in the short bibliography at the end.

It has often been the practice to refer to the various groups of European art as schools. We thus speak in this way rather loosely of the Italian or the Byzantine school, or in a more closely defined way of groups within these larger schools, such as the Florentine or the Constantinopolitan. But even these narrower groups are not schools, properly speaking, for in both these instances there were numerous different masters, all teaching very different things, and teaching them at

different times. Using the word in a narrower sense still, writers often speak of the schools of particular painters, such as that of Giotto or that of Raphael. Both these painters, and many others also, had followers, who copied their styles and methods, who had learnt in their workshops, and who painted in the way that their masters had painted before them. Their works are indeed often referred to as school pieces. This is by far the most satisfactory use of the term, and if the word "school" is used in the pages that follow, it will be used in this sense.

The story of European painting really begins at Pompeii, for though there were many other places where work of importance was done in the early centuries of our era, it is at Pompeii that the greatest number of paintings survive, thanks to the fact that the city was buried by an eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79; the wall paintings that decorated its houses have been admirably preserved in all the freshness of their colouring ever since. Most remain *in situ*, but there are representative fragments in most of the great galleries of the West. Landscapes, figure studies, decorative paintings, still lifes, architectural compositions—indeed works of all kinds—were executed there on the walls of numerous villas, which in their day were the property of people of practically every walk of life excepting the very poorest. The paintings are important not only in themselves—and many are of very high quality—but also because of the very considerable legacy that they left to the future. The motifs, themes, and techniques that we see at Pompeii thus continued in use for many centuries to come, and the debt that early Christian art owed to the pagan art of Rome was very considerable. Indeed, the architecture-scapes, the landscapes, and certain of the figural compositions remained popular for many centuries, cropping up again and again in all kinds of different contexts, so that the influence was still alive even in the fourteenth century, when a new return to classical models and ideas served as the basis of the Renaissance in Italy.

The subject matter of the figural scenes was, however, changed as a result of the adoption of Christianity as the official religion in A.D. 330, and though the style of the new Christian paintings was usually close to that of the work at Pompeii, a completely new iconography suited to the demands of the new faith was soon developed. Indeed, its development had even begun before the new religion was officially accepted, as can be seen in paintings in the catacombs of Rome, or in others further afield, such as those in a church and in a synagogue at Dura, on the Euphrates, of around A.D. 245. Even by this date a definite system of depicting the chief scenes of the Bible story had been devised, and though many of the figures as well as the backgrounds resembled those of pagan art, having been modelled directly upon classical prototypes, the scenes were new as compositions. These early works can be distinguished quite clearly as representing essentially Christian scenes.

When once the method of depicting the new themes had been worked out, the arrangement for each scene of the Bible—its iconography as it is usually called—was followed with but little variation through many centuries. These early paintings thus have a dual interest; they have, or in any case the best of them have, a definite artistic quality of their own, and they are important as affording the prototypes of all the developments that followed for many centuries to come. It is indeed quite essential to know something about them if we want to study the development of Christian art through the ages. A painting from the Catacomb of Priscilla is illustrated on Pl. 4. The scene is a prophecy of Isaiah regarding the coming of Christ, and the Prophet is shown beside the Virgin Mary. As in all this early Christian art the main aim of the artist was to tell a story, but he does so with profound understanding, and even in this humble theme shows real powers of composition and interpretation. The painting is to be assigned to the third, even the second century, and is probably the earliest depiction of the Virgin that has come down to us.

There can be no doubt but that a great deal of

painting was executed at the same early date in other places besides the Catacombs, and some of it was probably on a more grandiose scale. Very little has unfortunately survived, though the records speak of work on a large scale and of great elaboration at Alexandria, which must have been a very important artistic centre. The style was probably akin to that of the numerous mummy portraits from Egypt which have survived. Examples are to be found in most museums and galleries, including the National Gallery in London. The best of them are extremely proficient technically and are in a forceful, effective style.

The next phase of development in Christian art is represented by the great mosaic decorations which were set up in the early churches. Constantinople must have been the main centre, for it was there that the governments of State and Church were situated, and these were the principal patrons. But in the absence of surviving monuments there, the mosaics that remain in other places, most notably Rome, serve to give an idea of this important chapter of art. Earliest in date are the mosaics on the vault of the church of Santa Constanza, of the fourth century, but they are still pagan rather than Christian in character. With the fifth century, however, the depiction of saints or Christian scenes had become universal, and there are admirable examples of the work of the early Christian artists in such churches at Santa Maria Maggiore, Santa Pudenziana and Saints Cosmo and Damian. Outside Rome, Salonica may be noted as an especially important centre where the art of this period may be studied; the superb mosaics of Ravenna mostly date from the sixth or early seventh century.

Mosaics were particularly highly prized at this time; they were regarded as more important than paintings, because of the richness of their material, and they were also more prized than sculptures: in the Byzantine world indeed they represent the principal form of art, and we think of mosaics in connection with the word Byzantine just as we think of sculpture in connection



with classical Greece or easel pictures in connection with Renaissance Italy. The wall mosaics were rich, impressive and sumptuous, and automatically gave an air of grandeur to any building that they decorated. It has, however, been questioned whether an artist could express the more profound subtleties of feeling in a mosaic in the way that he could in a painting, since the process of laying the tesserae was to some extent a mechanical one. Yet in the best work it is surprising how delicate the detail is, how fine the colouring, and how profound the feeling. One can tell at once the hands of the great masters from those of the artisans, as well as the varying quality of the different examples that survive. As in the case of Rubens' vast canvases, assistants must have had an important role to play, and the workshop system must have predominated. Each master, with his individual style, must have been assisted by a number of pupils and technicians, who had been trained by him and who were capable of doing exactly what he wanted. Such evidence as is available suggests that the master drew out the design on the plaster ground, sometimes in black outline, and sometimes in actual colour, and then he and his assistants set to work to lay the cubes in accordance with the design, doing a small area each day. Only very seldom were the cubes laid freehand. The master no doubt did the most important parts, such as the faces, where smaller cubes were usually used, while the assistants were entrusted with the figures, costumes or backgrounds according to their skill.

Though a number of early manuscripts, a few small panels, and occasional wall paintings have been preserved, the mosaics really constitute our primary evidence regarding the art of the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh centuries. But after a great burst of production in the sixth century, principally under the patronage of the Emperor Justinian, little was done in the East Christian world, for to begin with the treasury was too empty to permit the undertaking of extensive work and then, during the years between 726 and 843, the Empire

was ruled by a line of emperors who forbade any form of representation in religious art and who, like Islamic patrons on the one hand and the Puritans in England in the seventeenth century on the other, took pains to destroy all that had been produced before their day. The ban did not extend to Rome, however, and as many churches there seem to have been decorated with mosaics as with paintings even during the eighth century, for the Popes were generous patrons, and were no doubt keen to show their opposition to iconoclasm by patronizing figural work. With the accession to power at Constantinople of a new dynasty in 843 religious art began once more in the Eastern world, and there dawned an age of particular brilliance and importance. From then until the conquest of Constantinople by the Crusaders in 1204, art flourished in the East Christian world in a way that was hardly equalled in the West, and it is primarily towards the East that our eyes must be turned at this time.

Half a century ago the quality of this "Second Golden Age" of Byzantine art, as it is usually called, was hardly realized, and many even failed to pay any attention to it at all, thinking as did Gibbon when he wrote his great history, that the story of Byzantine art was one of prolonged decadence and decline. But discoveries of much new material which was unknown before about 1900, and the assumption of a new and broader outlook with regard to art as a whole, have served to prove the falsity of this conception. Byzantine art was, in its own way, good, even if the ideas behind it were different from those that inspired classical art or Renaissance art. And in addition, Byzantine art left an immense legacy, for by way of the great monastery of Montecassino in Italy, it became the basic inspiration behind the art of Benedictine monasticism in the West, and in any case until the twelfth century, the Benedictine communities were responsible for building and decorating practically all the great churches that were set up.

Byzantine art of this great age is perhaps not very easy to appreciate at a first glance. Indeed, no art

that is basically profound is very easy to understand till one has become familiar with its idiom ; one has, as it were, to learn a new language. The idiom of Byzantine art was, in the first place, an essentially Christian one, since the principal patronage came from the Church. Indeed, the whole outlook on life throughout the Byzantine world was essentially religious. Nearly all the more important buildings were churches, and secular paintings were few and far between. The artists did not sign their works ; they preferred to sink their individuality in the work itself, which was dedicated to the greater glory of God. Nor did the works necessarily attempt to please ; they were too much concerned with expressing the essence of the Orthodox faith for that to be possible. They aimed rather at transporting the spectator into a new world, where heaven was at hand, and where the whole atmosphere centred upon faith and a conception of the infinite, rather than upon actuality and a conception of the finite. The aim was thus the exact opposite of that of classical art. A contrast between the Parthenon at Athens and St. Sophia at Constantinople illustrates this comprehension. The former represents the acme of the classical style. The aim there was a finite one. Everything was neatly set out and clearly defined. The building was thus complete in itself ; it could not be extended ; it could go no further ; in fact, perfection had been achieved, and it is impossible to conceive of a building in the same style that is more perfect than the Parthenon. To the Byzantine artist such a comprehension was unthinkable ; perfection was possible only to God ; God was something infinite, and could only be approached by means of a search of which infinity was the object. The dome of St. Sophia expresses this idea ; it suggests infinite possibilities, both of an architectural and a spiritual character, and it seems in some curious way wellnigh limitless in its extent. There is something strange and distant, almost incomprehensible, about it, and the same is true of Byzantine art as a whole. It is pervaded by a great tenderness, and a great sincerity, but it is at the

same time somehow not quite of this world. Just as the artists remained anonymous, so do their works to some extent remain inaccessible. This inaccessibility is a part of their glory. The great mosaic at the summit of the dome at Daphni near Athens in Greece, which dates from about 1100, affords an admirable example (Pl. 3). The figure is mysterious, strange, distant, almost one might say, awesome. But it is at the same time amazingly beautiful and impressive, though the idiom is one with which the average Westerner is not at all familiar.

By the end of the twelfth century however a rather more personal, humanistic, idiom had begun to penetrate the Byzantine outlook, and in wall paintings at Nerez, dating from 1164, there is a new element of humanity, emotion and intimacy, which was absent in the earlier work. This tendency was carried forward in progressive work in the following century in Greece, the Balkans, Russia, and Constantinople alike, and in all these places art of outstanding quality was produced. The climax was probably reached in the mosaics and wall paintings in the church of the Chora at Constantinople, now more usually known by its Turkish name Kahrîeh Camii. There is perhaps not quite the same interest in human personality or in three-dimensional treatment as in the wall paintings of Giotto done at Padua and elsewhere in Italy at much the same date, but there is perhaps a more profound realization of the spirit of the divine. The conception is gentler and more personal than in the Christ at Daphni, but the art is still spiritual rather than material, of the other world rather than of this, and the Chora mosaics and paintings, together with a great many other products of the age, must be numbered amongst the world's most outstanding and most beautiful works of art.

I have written at some length of Byzantine art, for it has frequently been neglected; this perhaps deserves some apology, because for the average person it is so very difficult to see these Byzantine works. They are nearly all mosaics or wall paintings, so that they cannot themselves be transported. The most accessible of them

are many hundreds of miles away, in Constantinople or Salonica ; many more are in distant monasteries in Greece or the Balkans, which can be reached only after arduous journeys on foot or on horseback ; many are now behind the " Iron Curtain " and cannot be reached at all. Of paintings on a smaller scale, that is, panels, very few survive. The most important of them, a twelfth-century painting of the Virgin and Child known as " Our Lady of Vladimir ", is now preserved in Moscow, though it was actually painted in Constantinople. Examples of thirteenth-century date are, it is true, rather more numerous, but even so, it is in collections in Russia, Greece, or Yugoslavia that the best examples are housed, and there is little to be found in the West ; such examples as are available there are mostly of secondary importance. The amateur has therefore, willy-nilly, to rely upon reproductions ; happily, coloured plates of good quality are becoming rather more common, and in recent years exhibitions of fine facsimiles have been arranged, notably of the Ravenna mosaics and of wall paintings from Yugoslavia ; it is to be hoped that exhibitions of this character will continue.

Outside the area directly controlled from the Byzantine capital at Constantinople, Russia was probably the most important centre of development of Orthodox Christian art. When Christianity was introduced to Russia in the tenth century, a great deal in the way of art was imported from Constantinople, either directly, or because Byzantine craftsmen went to Russia in comparatively large numbers. Subsequently the local men began to learn from the Greeks, and a distinctively Russian style in Byzantine painting came into being, though Russian art remained basically Byzantine. Numbers of local schools were developed all over the country. They were especially flourishing in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and around 1400 one painter of outstanding genius, Andrew Rublev (c. 1370-1430), was producing paintings quite as fine as any that ever came out of Italy. By the sixteenth century

however the true creative spirit had been lost, and little of what was produced was more than hack work.

Similar schools developed also in the Balkans, especially in what is today Yugoslavia, but both there and in Greece not a great deal of real consequence was done after the fifteenth century, for the free and natural development of Christian art, with the Church and ruler as the principal sources of patronage, was interrupted by the Turkish conquests of around 1450. What was done after that date, though often attractive, was not of outstanding significance. In fact Byzantine art declined into a peasant art, the story of which cannot concern us here.

The development of painting in western Europe was for many centuries closely bound to what was happening in the Byzantine world, for not only did the art of both regions spring from the same classical and Early Christian stems, but also Byzantine art, as it developed, exercised a considerable influence not only in Italy, but also in the Western world north of the Alps. In this case the influence came either through Italy or independently, as a result of direct contact with the Byzantine world. Western art of the first millenium, however, was never quite so transcendental as was that of the Byzantine world. As in Latin literature, as opposed to Greek, its highest achievements were in prose rather than in poetry; patronage was more limited, and the same outstanding heights were never reached in the West as in the best Byzantine mosaics, wall paintings or manuscripts. Indeed, when we remember that Constantinople was not only the home of the Emperor and a cultured court, but also the seat of the Patriarch and a powerful religious hierarchy, it is not surprising to find that things<sup>1</sup> reached to rather less brilliant summits of achievement elsewhere. Western art in Italy, and even in southern Germany at the courts of the Carolingian and Ottonian emperors, was indeed rather provincial, and though many iconographical and stylistic elements serve to distinguish it, there are features only little less marked which distinguish the work of different regions within the Byzantine world itself.

With the eleventh century, however, painting in the West began to develop along rather more independent lines, and though what is usually known as the Benedictine school of Romanesque painting in France remained faithful, broadly speaking, to the East Christian ideals, other schools began to grow up which were quite independent. The rather deep colouring, formal disposition and esoteric character of paintings like those at Berzé la Ville near Cluny, which belong to the Benedictine school, thus contrast very markedly with the brighter colouring, the lively attitudes and the general vividness of paintings like those that adorn the roof of the church of St. Savin, near Poitiers, which are to be classed in a distinct, intrinsically French group. These paintings represent the birth of a new style which was to develop from that time forward, until it was finally transformed around 1400 into the great style of panel painting that we know as the Flemish school.

Our knowledge of Romanesque painting, like our appreciation of Byzantine art as a whole, is something very recent ; indeed, no single adequately illustrated monograph on the subject was in existence before 1945. But since that time a number of good books, with coloured as well as monochrome illustrations, have appeared, and in addition there has been installed at the Palais de Chaillot in Paris an admirable collection of facsimiles, which enable one to study the art of Romanesque France in one central place almost as well as at first hand. The paintings themselves are of the greatest interest, and the installation of the museum is excellent ; it is to be counted as one of the most successful enterprises connected with the study of art of recent times.

Although fine manuscripts exist, Romanesque painting is represented primarily by large-scale monuments. That of the Gothic age is on the other hand all on quite a small scale. There are two principal reasons that account for this : in the first place, the passion for reducing to the minimum the wall space and enlarging to the maximum the windows that characterized Gothic

religious architecture, left no room for large paintings to be set up ; in the second place, the taste of this new age favoured the delicate and exquisite rather than the massive and extensive. Panels, however, hardly came into their own until the fifteenth or at most the fourteenth century, and until that time work was mainly confined to the illustration of manuscripts. Many of the illuminated pages to be found in these manuscripts are of astonishing beauty, and they have moreover real quality as paintings. Their study is, nevertheless, like that of Byzantine manuscripts, a specialized one, and is hardly likely to attract the amateur of painting as a whole. Nor is it very easy to see the original examples unless special permission is obtained to turn over the pages of the books in which they are contained. The manuscripts are thus not likely to come before the amateur more than occasionally, though one manuscript, the "Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry", may be quoted because of its outstanding quality (Pl. 6). It has been taken apart and its pages are to be seen in the gallery of the château at Cluny in France.

It was from later Gothic manuscripts like this that the first great northern style of panel painting was developed around 1400. The way was paved by one or two illuminators, like the Limburg brothers, who did the "Très Riches Heures", and who may also have done a few panels, and there is reason to believe that several of the great panel painters themselves also did illuminations in their earlier days. It has even been suggested, with a high degree of probability, that some of the miniatures in a famous book of hours formerly divided between the Trivulzio collection at Milan and the Turin library were actually the work of the brothers Van Eyck.

It was the Van Eycks above any others who transformed the exquisite and enchanting art of manuscript illumination, where the pictures are mainly linear and decorative, into a great style of panel painting. A good deal of dispute has ranged around these two brothers. Some scholars pretend that the style of the one can be quite easily distinguished from that of the other, and



parts of the largest and most famous picture connected with their names, the Ghent Polyptich, are confidently assigned to the elder brother, Hubert (*c.* 1395-1426), and other parts to the younger, Jan, (*c.* 1400-1441). Other authorities, on the other hand, assert that the elder brother is a mythical figure, and that all the work was done by Jan. There seems little real reason to dispute the evidence of tradition and to deny Hubert's existence, though the styles of the two are not so easily to be distinguished, especially by the amateur. What is important, is that they produced a number of works of outstanding quality, all of them paintings upon panels conceived on a monumental scale, even if not always of great size. One of the finest is to be seen in the National Gallery in London, namely the double portrait usually identified as that of John Arnolfini and his wife.

The lead of the Van Eycks was followed by a number of other painters, and their activities were assisted by a liberal patronage on the part of town councils, city companies, and individuals, who commissioned numerous altar pieces for their city churches or for particular chapels. The output of work was considerable, and for a hundred years or more a very high standard of excellence was maintained throughout Flanders. Such men as Roger van der Weyden (*c.* 1399-1464), Petrus Christus (*c.* 1400-72), Dirk Bouts (*c.* 1410-75), Hugo van der Goes (*c.* 1436-82), or Hans Memlinc (*c.* 1445-94), and many others were all working between 1400 and 1500, and all of them produced works of outstanding quality, which were revered in Italy almost as much as in their country of origin. Famous pictures by Van der Weyden, Van der Goes and Memlinc were purchased or commissioned by Italians, and Van der Weyden even visited Italy; the picture illustrated on Plate 9 was probably done while he was in Italy, for an Italian patron, and Michelangelo even went so far as to copy certain of the figures almost exactly in his panel of the "Entombment" in the National Gallery (Pl. 9 (*b*)).

The work of the Flemish school is particularly fine

and delicate, and though it tends towards a linear, non-plastic approach, and is closer in spirit to the Gothic age than to the Renaissance, it is capable of conveying very profound feeling and emotion as well as achieving a degree of exquisiteness seldom equalled in any age. With the sixteenth century, however, a great deal of this brilliance and loveliness had begun to wear off. New ideas which did not always blend very happily with those native to the region were introduced from Italy, and a generation of masters grew up who were not quite so outstanding as their predecessors. Such names as those of Quentin Matsys (*c.* 1466-1530), Bernard van Orley (*c.* 1492-1542), or Joos van Cleve (*c.* 1490-1540) may be noted. But two men among the later Flemish masters do nevertheless stand out supreme, namely Jerome Bosch (*c.* 1450-1516) and Peter Bruegel the elder (*c.* 1520-69). The work of both, especially that of Bosch, was often strange and fantastic, but it had astonishing freshness and brilliance which distinguished it from that of contemporaries or imitators, and at times its spiritual beauty was supreme, as in Bosch's "Christ Mocked" in the National Gallery in London. But Peter Bruegel was even more important, for though he began as a painter of fantasies, he ended as the first great landscape painter of European art. His series of pictures at Vienna representing the Seasons, his "Fall of Icarus" at Brussels or his "Massacre of the Innocents" (Pl. 12) have a lyrical beauty about them which has only rarely been achieved in the story of painting. The way that the sunlight strikes the newly ploughed land and the subtle manner in which the atmosphere of an early spring day is conveyed in "The Fall of Icarus"—one can almost smell the spring air—or the wonderful impression of cold, snowy weather in the "December" of the Seasons or in "The Massacre of the Innocents" show a mastery well in advance of his age.

The work of these men of the sixteenth century, outstandingly great or averagely talented as the case may be, brought to an end a definite chapter in the history of painting, and the story was only resumed in

the Flemish world when the changes and innovations emanating from Renaissance Italy had been fully assimilated. We must therefore at this stage retrace our steps south of the Alps, to the period in the twelfth century when we found a Byzantinized style still in control. It was strongly established in the monasteries, more especially the great Benedictine centre of Montecassino and its satellite houses. Vasari, the sixteenth-century historian of art, refers to the rather arid character of the paintings of this time, and throws the blame for its dullness on to its Byzantine character. The blame should rather be attributed to the fact that it was provincial. As already stated, recent research has served to reveal the high quality of true Byzantine work. As far as Italy was concerned however, Cavallini at Rome (c. 1250-1337), Cimabue (c. 1240-1302) and Giotto (c. 1266-1337) in Florence, and Duccio (c. 1250-1319) in Sienna came as innovators, and their work stands out as astonishingly brilliant and fresh.

Of all of them, perhaps the most important was Giotto, for though he began as a painter, executing the frescoes of the Arena Chapel at Padua around 1303, he ended as the architect of the magnificent campanile at Florence about 1335. He was thus the forerunner of the great personalities of the Renaissance who were distinguished not only as artists, but also because of their astonishing versatility. Giotto's paintings were especially outstanding because of his great feeling for depth and three-dimensional space. Byzantine painting, concentrating as it did on the transcendental and the mystic, was not concerned with realism, and the painters never made any serious efforts in this direction, preferring two-dimensional pattern on a surface to what modern critics have called "plastic form". But Giotto, who was more interested in reality than in visions, was responsible for the introduction of an entirely new conception—that of attempting to make figures in a painting look as though they were executed in sculpture. He was, indeed, responsible for such great changes during his lifetime that artists for the next half-century did little

more than mark time. Duccio, though a master of great delicacy and charm, and in his way also something of an innovator, was not so vital a figure as Giotto. But he founded the gentle, romantic school of Sienna, which was to be responsible for the production of numerous delightful and exquisite pictures during the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Most of these were on a fairly small scale, and remained faithful to the old religious outlook so far as their subject matter was concerned.

Though these men were the forerunners of the Renaissance, the process of change was mainly carried forward by those of the following generation. The most vital figure was probably Masaccio (1401-28), who developed the three-dimensional manner of Giotto, and in his short life of twenty-seven years ended by painting in a manner almost as advanced as that of Michelangelo. His interest, like Giotto's, lay in realism and three-dimensionalism, whereas other men of the age, like Uccello (1397-1475), experimented primarily with linear perspective. The fifteenth century was in fact an age of experimentation. The old Christian themes were considerably changed, new figures, new costumes, new arrangements, and a new interpretation of the personalities were adopted, and subjects from classical lore were even quite frequently substituted for the old religious ones. And with these changes in outlook there went equally sweeping changes in technique. Oils almost universally supplanted tempera, and canvases to a great extent replaced panels and wall paintings. The average size of portable pictures was considerably enlarged. New and more realistic colour schemes were introduced. In fact, in a century or thereabouts, the character of art underwent more change than had taken place in the previous thousand years.

In addition to these changes, another important feature that characterized the outlook of the age was the new interest in personality. The personages in the pictures thus became individual portraits, instead of being conventionalized figures. Artists began to sign

their pictures, and to take pains to see that their names were preserved in connection with them, and the names of individual patrons, nobles, popes, princelings and so on began to figure in connection with the works they sponsored. The names and characters of the individuals tended indeed to become the governing factors, and though churches were built and numerous altar pieces and sacred pictures were painted and set up in them, it is as the work of particular painters and the gifts of individuals that we know them, rather than as the devotional products of men who sought to glorify God by obliterating themselves.

To cite the names even of the major figures of Italian art between about 1400 and 1600, to discuss the numerous local schools, or to mention even a few of the outstanding works, would be far beyond the scope of this book. It must suffice to say that the tendency was throughout always in the direction of greater naturalism, greater three-dimensionalism and greater movement. Michelangelo (1475-1564) sought to effect these ends in the Sistine ceiling by stressing not only the perspective and recession, but also the projection of the figures (Pl. 8), and the effects that he achieved there led after a time to a new phase where the painter sought to show his figures in such high relief and to convey so much the spirit of movement and emotion that all sorts of tricks were resorted to in order to achieve the object. Michelangelo was thus the direct predecessor of the phase which we know as the baroque. Raphael (1483-1520) was much less concerned with projection and sculpturesque effects and more interested in personality on the one hand and the intricacies of composition on the other. His "Sistine Madonna" at Dresden (Pl. 10(a)) shows this clearly. The Virgin is thus a person, an individual, rather than a type; the sheer loveliness of the painting as a work of art is achieved by the very subtle nature of its composition. Of all the painters of Italy it was probably Raphael who paid most attention to this aspect of art, and his works can be analysed to show the extraordinarily exact and stern discipline of

each picture. His sketches for his Madonnas show that innumerable small variations were tried out one after the other, until the ideal was discovered, and in working up the picture from its basic form nothing that was redundant was included. It is perhaps because of this that his works are not always readily appreciated at a first glance, for they are too severe to exercise a superficial charm. But when once they have been really looked at, they remain in the mind for ever.

Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) again paid great attention to composition, but it was perhaps the problems of modelling and shading that interested him most, and he laid tremendous stress on the inward significance of all that he did.

Bright colours captivate the crowd [he wrote], but the true artist seeks to delight the judicious. His aim is not to dazzle with colour, but to perform a miracle—to use the play of light and shadow in such a manner that things which are flat shall appear to be round. To sacrifice shadow to mere splendour of colour is to behave like a babbler, who cares more for high sounding language than for the significance of what he is saying.

This profoundness is apparent in all Leonardo's work, and everything that he did is as much the work of a great thinker as of a great painter. In this respect he was probably the most distinguished of all the great figures of the Italian Renaissance. His bent towards profound scientific enquiry may be contrasted with the approach of Botticelli (1444-1510), whose outlook was more closely akin to that of the old Gothic world; he was a mystic rather than a man of reason, and a painter whose work tells by its delicate charm rather than by its philosophic significance. Yet in his own quiet way he was just as great as the three more forceful giants of the age, Michelangelo, Raphael and Leonardo.

A further new factor of this age was that nearly all these men, with Leonardo foremost among them, turned to science for interest and aid. Michelangelo and Leonardo thus dissected human corpses to learn the workings of the muscles and the exact nature of the

skeletal frame; Leonardo's notebooks are, full of sketches of his studies in this direction and, as is well known, he carried his scientific enquiries into quite other fields as an inventor. Machines of war, water clocks, cantilever bridges, and even a flying machine that is suggestive of the modern flying saucer, all figure in the notebooks as carefully thought out and brilliantly executed drawings.

The advance made by these great men and their contemporaries was astonishing, but it left something of a vacuum at their death, and in Rome, where they mostly worked under the patronage of the Popes, and in Florence, where most of them were born, the next generation saw the growth of a mannerist style, which is less vital from the æsthetic point of view, though the works of painters such as Correggio (*c.* 1494-1534), Caravaggio (*c.* 1579-1610) and the Carracci (second half of sixteenth century), had perhaps an even greater influence on subsequent developments in the painting of western Europe than that of their greater predecessors. It was really the work of these mannerists that inspired such a respect for Italy in this country in the eighteenth century.

If Rome and Florence were the main centres of painting during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the axis in the sixteenth moved northwards to Venice, where such men as Gentile (1429-1507) and Giovanni Bellini (*c.* 1430-1516) had founded a school that was later to lead on to the glories of Titian (*c.* 1477-1576), Giorgione (*c.* 1478-1570), Tintoretto (1518-94), and Paolo Veronese (1528-88). The paintings of the earlier men were fresh and striking, and often had about them something of the flat, decorative brilliance of Islamic art, probably because of the close contacts which Venice maintained with the East, primarily for purposes of trade. The work of the later ones showed a similar affection for lovely colour and for decoration, but in a new form, for it was fuller and more luscious, and painters like Titian were deeply interested in what have been termed by recent critics "tactile values"—

that is, an interest in the actual stuffs and so on that appear in the pictures, which are often shown so forcefully that the spectator is almost drawn to touch the glorious velvets and silks that appear so often. If less imbued with a spirit of experiment and enquiry than the art of Florence, this art of Venice was perhaps more elaborate in conception, and the paintings of Titian and Giorgione are just as outstanding in their own way as those of Michelangelo and Leonardo in theirs. But the stress was on decoration, rich colour and movement, rather than on sculptural form or profundity of meaning. Veronese's "Marriage of Cana" (Pl. 11) shows this, for it might just as well depict a great civic banquet at Venice as a scene from the Bible.

The torch of Venice was carried far afield. Thus el Greco (1541-1614), who was born to the Byzantine tradition in Crete, remodelled his style under the influence of Venice, and took a Venetian style with him to Spain around 1577. And though his later work showed on the one hand something of a return to the Byzantine outlook and on the other the development of a distinctly personal manner, something of the colourful spirit of Venice remained with him to the end. It is there in his "Assumption" at Toledo (Pl. 15), both in the tactile values of the textiles and in the glorious richness of the flowers at the bottom of the picture.

Rubens (1577-1640) again learnt much from Venice, though his debt to the Roman mannerists and eclectics was perhaps just as great. He could, however, never have painted in just the way he did had he not known Venice first and Italy afterwards; indeed he spent several years of his early life in various parts of Italy studying and collecting. His figural work must all be looked at through Italianized spectacles, even if his landscapes are more intrinsically northern. It is perhaps in them, however, that he made his most important contribution to art, and it was virtually from where he left off in such a painting as the "Rainbow" landscape (Pl. 13) that Constable began nearly two centuries



later. Van Dyck (1599-1641), Rubens' pupil and assistant, also owed much to Titian, though he worked for some years in Genoa rather than Venice before he finally settled in England. Other Flemish painters owed a similar debt to the south, while Velazquez (1599-1660), Rubens' great contemporary in Spain, learnt a great deal from Italy both indirectly, through teachers and through copying, and directly, during two visits. His portrait of Pope Innocent X (Pl. 14) bears witness to this in its whole conception.

The story of Italian art really ends with the sixteenth century, though one can hardly leave Italy without mentioning the names of Tiepolo (1696-1770), Canaletto (1697-1768) and Guardi (c. 1712-93), the first as a decorator of baroque interiors of really outstanding ability, and the other two as landscapists of great charm. Italian influence, on the other hand, continued to be exercised even when little was being done in Italy itself. But north of the Alps, though prevalent, it was not always fundamental. Thus Holbein (c. 1497-1543) made use of Renaissance motifs in his decorative backgrounds or the framings of his woodcuts, though his work was otherwise of an essentially northern character both in subject (Pl. 16) and approach. Dürer (1471-1528) again, though he went to Venice and studied the works of Titian, remained in spirit closer to Gothic art than to that of the Renaissance. His lovely drawing of a hare illustrated on Plate 7, for example, finds readier prototypes in the illuminations of a Gothic manuscript than in the drawings of a Michelangelo. And if this was true of Dürer, who went to Italy, it is even truer of the other Germans who never travelled south of the Alps. There is thus but very little in the work of such men as Grünewald (active around 1500) or Schongauer (c. 1446-89) that is not northern, not least the choice of the medium that they preferred, namely engraving. Small-scale engravings, which could be reproduced and circulated to a large circle, were thus characteristic of the north, whereas the Italian patrons almost invariably sought the large picture in oils.

This same affection for work on a small scale characterized Holland, and though a few painters followed the style of the Italian mannerists, the majority explored a new path of their own which led towards precise realism of subject and exquisite detail of handling. The interiors and still lives of such men as Peter de Hooch (c. 1629-85) or the landscapes of Hobbema (1638-1709) and the Ruysdaels (seventeenth century) are typical of the new outlook. They stand in very marked contrast to the Italianate compositions of Poussin (1594-1665) and Claude Lorrain (1600-82), in whose works classical subjects are pre-eminent, and where a distinct classical manner of painting was practised, in opposition to the realist manner of the Dutchmen. Though both these men were Frenchmen, they really represent the Italian school of landscape painting more completely than does any Italian.

Of all the Dutchmen, one figure stands in a very independent position, neither showing a close influence from Italy, as did for example Honthorst (1590-1656) throughout his life, or Vermeer (1632-75) in his early days, nor remaining independent, like de Hooch or Hobbema. That figure was Rembrandt (1607-69). True, he could never have painted as he did if the Renaissance had not taken place, and that much he owed to Italy. But also, he never assimilated, nor came near to assimilating, all its ideas. Perhaps the factor that distinguishes his approach most of all is basically a religious one; his work has nothing of the atmosphere of seventeenth-century Catholicism about it. He is, every inch of him, a Protestant painter, and in much of his work appears as a man of profound faith governed by deep religious idealism. That he died a pauper and something of a renegade is beside the point, as is today the fact that in his lifetime his importance was largely unrecognized. His later paintings, with their sombre subjects, deep chiaroscuro, and heavy impasto, are something very distinct; his thought and outlook were essentially individual, and in spite of the fact that he had a number of close but uninspired followers, he stands

very much alone. His works have, in recent years, become tremendously popular with collectors, and fetch immensely high prices. To the individual their appeal depends very much on personal taste. No serious man would of course seek to denigrate his work, but it does not by any means appeal to all.

Apart from the Dutchmen, the tendency of seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century artists was to look towards Italy. Watteau (1684-1721) from France paid a visit there and owed much to the Renaissance heritage, in spite of the absolutely French basis of his outlook. Lancret (1690-1743), Fragonard (1732-1806), and the others showed the same tendency; only Chardin (1699-1779) remained aloof, being in some ways closer to the Dutchmen, though his work could never for one moment be mistaken for a product of Holland. And in England as we have already noted, Reynolds (1723-92) and the Academic painters not only paid great attention to Italy and the Italian masters, but also followed Italian models and Italian ideas very closely. Of all countries in the world England in the eighteenth century probably paid more attention to Italian art than any other.

Yet, in spite of this, it was in England that the first and most important revolts against the thralldom of the Italian style were staged, firstly quite early in the century when Hogarth (1697-1764) took up a definite stand against the exaggerated Italianism which characterized taste at the time, secondly at the end of the century in a completely unconscious way, when Gainsborough (1727-1788) and Constable (1776-1837) set up new naturalistic canons of their own, and thirdly, just before the middle of the nineteenth century, when the Pre-Raphaelites constituted themselves into an organized body, and set out to combat the style and ideas of the later Italians. The first of these revolts was the more or less isolated effort of a single individual, yet the brilliance of Hogarth's style, the sincerity of his outlook, and his biting criticism of the somewhat shallow reverence that was held for everything Italian regardless of its quality, brought distinction to his work and added insight to his ideas.

He was a painter of outstanding importance and a figure totally, almost uncompromisingly, English. He was one of the first to develop a type of picture which was to prove very popular in this country from the middle of the century onwards, namely the conversation piece, and he extended the idea into a vein hitherto not followed at all, that of the narrative picture which unfolded what he termed a moral tale in a series of scenes. Though his conversation pictures were delightful and his portraits brilliant, these narrative pictures were probably his most important contribution to art.

The second had a wider, more universal influence, not only because Gainsborough and Constable were outstanding painters of their day, but also because they were heralds of a new vein in painting which was subsequently to become a great style, epitomizing all that was best in the nineteenth century. Constable, in some curious way, even succeeded in doing quite easily and naturally exactly what the French Impressionists were to set out to do by avowed intention more than a generation later. The Impressionists in fact began where Constable had left off some thirty years before. There is, however, little serious evidence to suggest that any of the Impressionists had ever seen any of Constable's works until they were mature men whose style had been fully formed. It is true that Constable had exhibited in France in 1824, in the famous Salon des Anglais, so called because of the outstanding quality of the works of Constable, Lawrence (1769-1830), and Bonington (1801-28) which were shown at it. But this was long before any of the Impressionists had appeared on the scene, and there were practically none of Constable's pictures in France. And the only painter whom we know of who was deeply influenced at the time was Delacroix (1798-1863), though even in his case the influence does not seem to have been very lasting. Indeed, so far as one can tell, the first opportunity any of the Impressionists had of seeing Constable's work, and for that matter, Turner's (1775-1851) also, was when Monet and Pissarro came to London in 1870 as refugees

during the Franco-Prussian War. It was Turner's later work that interested them most, however; his earlier paintings like the "View of Durham" (Pl. 17) must have seemed to them comparatively tame and conservative.

Though none of the Pre-Raphaelites in the nineteenth century were of anything like the same stature as Gainsborough, Constable or Turner, the importance of the Pre-Raphaelite movement was considerable, even though work in that style was in its own day hardly known outside this island,—it is still regarded overseas primarily as a curiosity. But a number of painters of no mean stature clubbed together to work in the same way, governed by very closely formulated ideas. They were, in a curiously contrary sense, symptomatic of the age to which they belonged, and the movement was paralleled both in Germany and in Russia. Thus in the former country a group known as the Nazarenes sought to escape from the over-sophistication of the Italianate style and to recreate something of the purity of the mediaeval world, while in the latter a group known as the Peredvizniki set out with the aim of producing a simple, unassuming sort of art, which could be at once comprehended by the masses. So the Pre-Raphaelites sought simplicity, though the aims that guided them were of a rather complicated character. The painters themselves were really intellectuals, who thought out their pictures and their problems with very great care, and they did not so much set out to please the multitude as to produce a new and purer form of art by going back to the fresh, unsophisticated models and ideas of the earlier Siennese and Florentine painters whom we now term the Primitives.

To some extent they succeeded, for though some writers attacked their work with the greatest virulence, others supported it with equal enthusiasm. From the theoretical and intellectual point of view the Pre-Raphaelite movement was of very great importance; it was sponsored by figures in the world of thought and literature, and the works of the painters are still of extraordinary interest. But however enthralling or

captivating, they cannot be said to be of the same outstanding æsthetic significance as those of the Impressionists in France working nearly a generation later.

This movement was inspired much less by intellectual and much more by purely painterly ideas. Its protagonists did not seek for inspiration in pre-Renaissance Italy or in the world of the Middle Ages. They did not look for greater purity of thought in visions of a past age, nor did they concentrate on themes of a literary character. Rather, they set out to paint pictures of things they saw before them, in a new way, casting aside the old methods and old shibboleths because they did not suit their ideals of truth and honesty. They set out to paint things as they were, without any artificiality; they worked most usually in the open air, and chose simple, straightforward themes; they evolved a new technique, where the colours were set on as primary shades, which were blended by the eye when once on the canvas rather than by the brush on the palette. The paintings that were produced by these men were on the whole of far greater significance than those of the Pre-Raphaelites, if for no other reason than that they were essentially painterly rather than literary. The movement in fact was a painter's affair, the outcome of a manner of painting, which had the production of paintings as its sole objective, whereas that of the Pre-Raphaelites was governed by an idealistic philosophy of life. From the point of view of the social historian, the Pre-Raphaelite movement will perhaps prove to be the more interesting; but from that of the artist or the student of æsthetics, Impressionism was without doubt of far greater significance.

These two were however by no means the only movements of the nineteenth century, nor was Impressionism the last of them. The century was above everything else an age of new movements or of the revival of old ones, and even art of an essentially academic type tended to follow one type of revival or another, and to show great variety in the process. There is thus little obvious connection between the recording of a Frith

(1819-1909), in such a painting as his "Derby Day" (National Gallery), the broad exhibitionism of a Maclise (1806-70), for example in his "Death of Nelson" (Westminster, London), the illusionistic fantasies of a John Martin (1789-1854), the vivid idealism of a Burne-Jones (1833-98) or the penetrating analysis of a Ford Madox Brown (1821-93), for example in his famous "The Last of England" (Tate). Yet all these men, if not of exactly the same age, were alive and working at the same time. And in France contrasts were even more marked; the severely classical figure-painting of an Ingres (1780-1867), the romantic compositions of a Delacroix (1798-1863), the penetrating realism of a Daumier (1808-79), the painterly experimentation of a Courbet (1819-77), the idealistic charm of a Corot (1796-1875), the photographic exactitude of a Meissonier (1813-91), the brilliant understanding of a Manet (1832-83), or the fleeting impressions of a Monet (1840-1926); all again could have been seen in a single exhibition of the work of living painters. So different are all these manners, so wide the ideas and aims that they embrace, that it is impossible to speak of a French school or a British school in the nineteenth century and at the same time convey any clear impression of what is implied. The terms would at best be purely geographical ones. Diversity is the keynote of the age, and in a brief survey such as this, only a few of the more outstanding landmarks can be indicated.

In spite of the very great quality of the work of a few of the British masters—Alfred Stevens (1817-75) is in many ways the most important man who worked in this country—France was undoubtedly the main centre of painting in the nineteenth century, and quite a few of France's painters at this time may be numbered among the world's most outstanding masters. Some would include Ingres in this category, though others (rightly, I think) would question this. Few would include Delacroix. But Daumier, if he had executed more paintings on a large scale, like his "Good Samaritan" at Glasgow (Pl. 19), so magnificent in design, so

profoundly full of compassion and feeling, would almost certainly qualify, and so would Courbet on the evidence of his best work, though he was a very variable painter and many of his pictures are quite banal. Manet, however, who was in many ways the greatest of them all, qualifies on all counts, his powers of design, colour, painterliness and originality all being outstanding. Of the pure impressionists Monet and Pissarro (1830-1903) are the most important; the work of both was mainly limited to landscapes, but these are to be numbered among the world's finest, and they have a freshness and loveliness seldom equalled elsewhere. Pissarro's view of Pointoise done in 1873 is typical (Pl. 22) and serves admirably to illustrate the wonderful understanding of light that was the chief characteristic of the Impressionists. Seurat (1859-91), who represents the ultimate point of development that the Impressionist technique could reach, should again probably be classed as a great genius, though he became so obsessed by his own theories that he was really more of a genius *manqué*. Renoir (1841-1919), though an Impressionist as far as his earlier works and his technique were concerned, was at heart bound to Classicism, and his later paintings of nudes owe a marked debt both to ancient Roman art and to Ingres; he has a feeling for sculptural form which excelled that of the other Impressionists. Degas (1834-1917), on the other hand, was essentially a painter of rhythmical pattern, and was more concerned with composition than anything else. He loved to set himself complicated problems to conquer, and he was more concerned with these problems than with nature or three-dimensionalism. This is clearly to be seen in his picture of laundresses ironing shown on Plate 21. But all these men, whether confessedly Impressionist or not, brought a new life and a new reality to all that they did. To paint what they saw, as it was, without any artificial improvement or arrangement; to paint colour and light in all its fullest brilliance; and to make a great picture out of a simple everyday subject—these were their aims. For them the subject mattered not at all;



it was the manner of its rendering, its interpretation, that was all-important, and it was in this that they differed from the Academicians and in this that they covered so much new ground. And though each of them was an individual and was not necessarily prepared to accept the ideas of the others, the Impressionist movement constituted the last of the great "schools" of painting that the world has so far seen.

The next phase in France was thus an extremely confused one. It is usually known as the post-Impressionist. But the term is really, neither a chronological nor a descriptive one, for on the one hand painters like Cézanne (1839-1906), who represent this new phase completely, were more or less contemporaries of the older Impressionists—Cézanne was born in 1839 and Monet in 1840—and on the other hand the aims of many post-Impressionists, like Van Gogh (1853-90) and Gauguin (1848-1903), were the more or less natural outcome of Impressionism. This is certainly the case with the Gauguin of *Ozny*, shown on Plate 24. These men were thus primarily painters of light, as were the Impressionists, while Cézanne was essentially a painter of form, and had less in common with such a man as Monet than he had with many of the great masters of the past. Indeed, much of his work is the very antithesis of Monet's, for Cézanne eliminated from his later work all but the basic elements of form, whereas Monet concentrated so much on colour and light, that his latest works, like "*The Nymphéas*" in the Orangerie in Paris, seem to be almost entirely formless when seen in a monochrome reproduction. Cézanne's analysis of form, which we see beginning in his view of *Pontoise* (Pl. 22) and going further in the portrait of his wife (Pl. 20), was, in fact, to lead directly to cubism and formalism, as it was developed by Bracque (b. 1881) and by Picasso (b. 1881) in certain phases of his strangely varied output. Cézanne remained basically representational, though he simplified and analysed the forms of his subject matter, especially the *Mont St. Victoire*, to such an extent that his pictures became almost

angular, formal compositions. But those who followed him often eliminated the representational aspect entirely, making their pictures into purely abstract compositions. The Picasso still-life shown on Plate 23 represents a half-way stage, where objects are still recognizable.

Furthermore, the development of art after the end of the nineteenth century became additionally complicated as the result of travel and exploration. Previously what a man could see around him, what he could learn from the past, and what he could cull from his own imagination were the chief, if not the only sources of inspiration. But at the end of the nineteenth century a whole new range of influences came into play, and artists began to pay more and more attention to such things as the Negro sculptures of West Africa, Japanese prints, Polynesian dance masks or North American totem poles. Thus Bonnard (1867-1947), in his earlier work, shows clearly the inspiration of the Japanese print, while Modigliani (1884-1920) was much influenced by African sculpture. And as quickly as the horizon widened, so the new ideas were absorbed (or sometimes only half absorbed) till a state of confusion arose, in which it was hard for the layman to discern rhyme or reason. The confusion still lingers. Indeed, any study that only takes into account the more recent manifestation of art can hardly hope to dispel it, for the wheel has taken a complete turn from naturalism to abstraction. But if our eyes are directed further afield, what at first sight seems incomprehensible begins to fall into focus, for the formalism of Celtic art or the Greek geometric style, the expressionism of the Orient, or the esoteric transcendentalism of the Byzantine, all are reflected in many of the more recent experiments. And even if the ideas and aims of the artists of today are not always easy to understand, a realization of the fact that rather similar things have been done at other times in the past, should help to make the appreciation of the paintings of today a somewhat less difficult problem.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE ART OF TODAY AND TOMORROW

WHEN we visit an exhibition of the art of some period of the past, say, for example, of that of the eighteenth century, one of the most important factors that distinguishes it is the element of period. In the first instance the art is of its age, and each age has its own very distinctive characteristics. Here and there, of course, there are overlaps, and a particular work tends to puzzle the experts because it appears either as unusually conservative or unduly precocious for the date to which it actually belongs. But generally speaking, even the novice can distinguish the work of one period from another, while the expert can date paintings or other works of art with a very great degree of accuracy, even when there are no dates actually inscribed upon them. For example, thanks to the penetrating analytical study which has been given to Greek vase painting by a few outstanding experts in the last half-century, fragments of vases can be dated to very limited periods; it is thus possible to assign such things to dates within a bracket of five to ten years, whereas little more than half a century ago, the bracket extended over one or even two centuries. Even in the case of ancient Egypt, where art continued with surprisingly little change for some 4,000 years, the specialist can today distinguish quite accurately at least the work of each dynasty.

In more recent times the change of style from age to age has been a great deal more rapid. Though the Gothic style lasted for some 400 years, its various phases were thus quite clearly defined, and in Italy there was as great a difference between work produced around 1480 and that done in about 1520 as was arrived at after several centuries in the Byzantine world or perhaps even millennia in Egypt. But even if a particular style in Renaissance Italy or in other part of Europe

after about 1500 was comparatively short-lived, it now appears, as we look back, as something clearly defined, and a date can be assigned to it without great difficulty.

As we see it from close at hand, however, the art of today seems to be distinct in this particular, for it embraces a very great number of quite different styles, some of which are very advanced and some very conservative. And if, in two hundred years' time, we were to visit an exhibition of pictures of all types done say in 1953, the variety of styles that it would comprise would no doubt seem astonishing. Some of the work, produced by artists of considerable ability and complete sincerity, would thus be almost as precise and exact as that of the Italian primitives ; some would be vague and hazy, seeking to convey effects like those obtained by the French Impressionists of the mid-nineteenth century ; some would be completely academic, savouring of the style of a Landseer ; some would be violently daring and experimental, following none of the established rules of form or colour and casting aside any attempts at representation.

If then the art of each past age has its hallmark, that of the art of today may perhaps be said to be its diversity. Revival has succeeded revival, new movement has been succeeded by still newer, all in the course of some eighty years. Each style has had, and still has, its devotees, and the observer is taken aside by one enthusiast and told that all this abstract art is meaningless and decadent, while he is told by another that representation is all rot. A third says that all that is necessary to produce good art is to imbibe the glories of nature ; a fourth asserts that precise drawing is so much waste of time. Amidst these diverse views, the observer stands confused. In which direction should he turn ? Which of all these arts is truly characteristic of the age, which is the most genuine, and to which style should he give his allegiance ?

As far as merit is concerned, the question is one which the spectator will eventually have to decide for himself. It is however not so much a question of intrinsic merit,

but rather one as to which of these various styles is truly modern and not merely contemporary, in the wider sense of being done at the moment. It is therefore only of one group that we need speak here, namely the abstract, where the old laws have been discarded, and where the cult of representation has been almost, if not entirely, forsaken.

The question that the layman at once asks when he sees examples of this sort of art are : why is it like that ? What is the point of painting things that have no resemblance to anything that is to be seen in the world around ? What does the artist mean by it all ? These are very legitimate questions and it is perhaps to be regarded as a fault of modern art that it gives rise to such questions in the minds of those who look at it. Art should be just as comprehensible a facet of its age as anything else, for from the earliest times it has always been an essential in each age. If it can be understood only after elaborate explanations and analyses, surely there is something wrong, either with the art or with the public ? It is perhaps true that the man who comes fresh to art tends to like the banal ; but in this case even the experienced amateur of art is often baffled when he should be in a position to appreciate. Nevertheless, that is how the art is, and it would be pointless to waste words in condemning it ; rather should one seek to understand and appreciate, even if to do so is not at first very easy.

Quite a number of reasons can be found to explain the character of modern art. It has more than once been asserted that art is the mirror of its age, or that each age gets the art it deserves, which is to say much the same thing in slightly different words. The spirit of an age of faith like the Byzantine was thus reflected in the deeply spiritual, essentially transcendental character of Byzantine art. The spirit of enquiry that governed the outlook of the fifteenth century in Italy was mirrored in the essentially progressive painting of Ucello, Masaccio, Michelangelo or Leonardo, and the many other artists who were preoccupied with enquiries

into perspective, anatomy, new systems of colour-blending and so on. The material prosperity and rational culture of the mid-eighteenth century showed itself in the clear-cut, matter-of-fact, straightforward portraiture of the time.

Today we live in an age of change and confusion. We do not know where to turn, or whither the future may bring us. The old social organization, the old boundaries of space and time, the old limitations of natural surroundings, have all been destroyed in the lifetime of a single generation. The world has been wracked by the two greatest wars of its history in the brief space of thirty years. Shells and bombing, destruction and death, have come very close to us. A new and virulent political creed has been born which divides the world, it would seem almost inseparably, into two camps. Where then can the artist look for stability, where for guidance, where for faith? The priest would say, return to God. But the artist asks, how can the aspect of our age tally with the old faith. The communist would say, discard faith, turn to dialectical materialism, but the limitations of a police state and the total disregard of human rights and human sympathies that the artist sees in the communist world appals him. The old ideas are passing, and the art of today reflects this change. There is a story that during the German occupation of Paris, a German official had to call on Picasso on business. As he left, at the close of the interview, he caught sight of one of Picasso's most recent abstractions. "My God," he exclaimed involuntarily, "who did that?" "You did," replied Picasso.

The nature of our art, then, is perhaps not surprising when we cast our eyes around us, and if we pause to think, the question "Why do the artists do such things?" is not so hard to answer. But the second question "What is the point of painting things that have no resemblance to nature?" is rather more complicated. It is not merely a question of appreciating non-representational art, though it is hoped that the examination that we have given to abstract art in a preceding chapter

may help towards an understanding of the modern artist's ideas. Numerous instances of abstract art can be cited from the past, and in other chapters of this book an attempt has been made to show something of their quality. If there is any representation in such works, it is of so stylized a character that the fact that living forms had served as the basis of the art is discernible only through study and the closest attention. The delight of the work depends on the one hand on its rhythmical pattern, which is by itself capable of "bowling over" the observer, and on the other on the beauty of its colour. It may be argued that these things are in no way equal in degree to the compositions of a Raphael or a Titian, and such an argument would be just. But it cannot therefrom be argued that such things as the "Book of Lindisfarne" or a modern abstract picture are entirely lacking in the qualities that constitute great works of art.

It is sometimes assumed that art of this type is no more than "decorative", that even if it is pleasant and delightful in itself, it has no greater or more profound significance than that of a good wallpaper or a nice coffee cup; that is to say that it may be "charming", but no more. That however is really not the case. Just as very profound thought may be of an abstract rather than a concrete character, so may abstract art also be fundamentally extremely profound. For example, the artist who was responsible for the decoration of the Susa pot (Fig. 1) was obviously impressed by the "horniness" of his ram. Somehow its curve and its form inspired him with a feeling that all the essence of the creature was concentrated in the one massive curve, and so the curve became the principal element of his composition. Similarly the abstract artist of today seeks to express his interpretation of objects and emotions, of philosophy and of thought, in purely geometric or rhythmic forms. Such forms are often understood by mathematicians more readily than by anyone else, and in such a case the artist may be said to be reflecting the complexities of the mathematicians'

or the physicists' thought in the visual forms of his works.

There is one clear-cut difference however, between the older work and the modern, namely that the artist of today is not only interested in creating form and expressing an idea, but also in the problem of expressing himself, whereas the ancient artists, taken as a whole, seem to have been but little concerned with this. The word "self-expression" has indeed become a veritable slogan of modern art, and a large proportion of artists have become so interested in the business of self-expression, that they have set aside the idea of trying to give expression to something bigger and greater than self. The Byzantine artist who executed the mosaic of Christ in the dome at Daphni (Pl. 3) had in a way an easier task, for he was seeking to express a general idea for the benefit of people who themselves believed in that idea, and his revelation was thus not a purely personal one. But both he and the artists of today are alike seeking to do more than just render visual appearances, to do more than produce pleasant decoration, delight of pattern, or harmony of colour. They are seeking to express an idea, and behind the representation there is at play the artists' vision, which is profounder, more sensitive and more all-seeing than that of the ordinary man.

There is no reason to conclude that self-expression is in itself bad or wrong. Without it, the artist's work would lack individuality and personality, however skilful a practitioner he were. Without the element of self, it would be impossible to distinguish a Raphael from a Michelangelo, a Rubens from a Velazquez, a Reynolds from a Gainsborough. But in addition to the personal element, which marks the work of each man, the themes that the great painters of the past sought to express were in general quite clearly defined. The classical Greek artist thus wished to conceive of the spirit of the divine in human form; his efforts are paralleled in the literature and in the whole outlook of the age to which he belonged. The Roman artist



was concerned either with glorifying the power of the Emperor, or with expressing in portraiture the character of individual patrons ; once more his aim was a part of the general complex of the age to which he belonged. The Byzantine artist tried to convey in the spirit of his work the whole essence of the Christian faith, and the mediæval artist in the north was guided by much the same view ; the age was one of faith, and artists, patrons and people alike were an intrinsic part of the faith. Both in East and West, these Christian artists often had recourse to a considerable degree of stylization and abstraction in order to express this faith, as we see for instance in the nature of Romanesque sculpture. The Gothic artist was similarly guided by faith, but it was of a less spiritual character, since the new learning made the society of his day more terrestrial : he took more account of human personality and of individual achievements, and was much less concerned with the world beyond and the life of the future.

It was really with the Renaissance that the overwhelming interest in the individual first made itself felt, and the artist combined with this an enquiry into all that was new and experimental. He used classical forms, but not in the way that the Greeks had used them. His approach was nearer to the Roman, but the art was at the same time more alive and more poetical. The guiding spirit of the Christian faith, too, survived from mediæval times to some extent, even if it was more personal and less ætherial than it had been in the Romanesque or Byzantine era. But as time went on it was to a great extent discarded, and in the seventeenth, even more in the eighteenth, century, there is little of truly Christian spirit in art, even if Christian scenes were depicted with great skill and ability. But even if faith in Christ declined in its influence, some sort of governing idea or ideal was there ; it may have been a reverence for the classical, as with Poussin ; it may have been the personal intimacy of a reformed Christianity as with Rembrandt ; it may have been the grandeur of Catholic Christendom, as with Rubens.

Sometimes again the artist hoped to ameliorate man's life and conditions, as did Hogarth ; sometimes he sought to express the glory of nature, as did Constable ; but always there was some clearly defined and reasonably comprehensible aim.

But today the old rules and the old faiths have been discarded. Even if he is a Christian, the artist does not find himself called to testify the faith, as did the sculptor of the west door at Chartres. Even if he admires Greece and Rome," the artist does not lose himself in wholehearted adoration of the classical, as did so many of the great figures of the Renaissance from Raphael to Wren. Even if he is an ardent monarchist, it does not occur to him to bear witness to his enthusiasm by reflecting the quality and grandeur of monarchy in every work he produces. Only perhaps if he is a convinced communist does any overwhelming subservience to an external factor possess him. But, unfortunately, the only art that has come out of communist Russia has so far been banal in the extreme, presumably because an atmosphere of fear pervades society, and under such an atmosphere good art is wellnigh impossible. But with this one exception—if exception it be—the guiding star has been lost. Is it not to a great extent because of the lack of this star that much of today's art seems so difficult to comprehend ?

There is of course a further factor that complicates the question of appreciating modern art, namely the very fact that it is modern. In the past a good deal of art that has subsequently come to be respected and admired was disregarded in its own day just because the artists were in advance of their times. It is thus common knowledge that Wagner's harmonies were considered hideously discordant when his first operas were produced, though today they seem quite normal. The paintings of the Impressionists in France in the nineteenth century were dismissed by some ninety per cent of the critics as childish, and were denied a place in official public exhibitions. Constable, Turner and other "progressive" painters of the later eighteenth and early

nineteenth centuries in this country were thought by many of their contemporaries to be bunglers. Rembrandt died in poverty, unable to sell more than a few odd paintings, for though his early works were admired, his later ones were passed over as far too experimental.

Taken as a whole however, it was the critics and connoisseurs who condemned these works rather than the public. The painters failed to receive recognition, not so much because their works were incomprehensible to the average man, as because they failed to please the arbiters of taste of their time. Indeed, there is evidence which suggests that the works of many of these men were valued by some at least of their contemporaries, and those the ordinary men in the street. Today the situation is reversed, for it is the critics who praise modern art, whereas the public both fails to appreciate it and to understand it. And though the critics may praise it, they do not very often succeed in explaining it or in showing in what respects it is admirable. At best they saw, with Eric Gill, that it is the artist's business to bowl a man over and the spectator's business to be bowled over by the work. But though the average man is quite often bowled over by an ancient work because of its faithfulness to nature, its grandeur, its colour, its theme, or similar factors that are easily intelligible to him, he is not so frequently bowled over by the modern work, except in the way of being amazed at its incomprehensibility.

Admittedly the business of discerning quality in an unfamiliar idiom is extremely difficult and is not given to all. Like the sense of perfect pitch in music, it is something which some people possess and others do not. And though regular contact with works of art does make it easier to judge quality, the gift of realizing what will eventually prove great and what insignificant is hardly to be acquired. The critic of true discernment, the man able to spot talent in obscurity, is almost as rare a being as the artist himself. He is born and not made, and if but one such appears in each generation we may think ourselves lucky. Diaghilev, the great

impresario of the Russian Ballet, was one such. He was able to choose from comparative obscurity musicians, choreographers and scene designers as well as dancers, and he seldom made a mistake, even if all those he selected were not able to achieve more than occasional greatness. Ruskin, in some of his judgements, was another, for he fought Turner's battles. But even so, he was far from infallible, for he was unable to see quality in Constable's work. Perhaps he was really too much interested in Ruskin to be a really great critic of the work of others. Baudelaire in France again wrote some of the finest art criticism that has ever been penned, and he came out in defence of the Impressionists, and was prepared to stand by his judgements. His contemporary Zola was also ready to back his own judgement regarding the importance of the Impressionist movement against those of the multitude of writers of the day. In this country Roger Fry approached nearest to these men, but in actual fact he did little more than follow the path already blazed out by them when he introduced Impressionism and post-Impressionism to Britain. And though he was capable of discerning what was great in the work of these schools, his judgements were in other ways sometimes narrow and prejudiced; he was, for example, unable to see any good in Greek art. He became, it would seem, so enthusiastic a supporter of all that was exotic, that he was in the end unable to appreciate the more conventional. But he was outstanding, and such men have on the whole been the exceptions rather than the rule. Of recent years there have been few names that stand out like those of Ruskin or Baudelaire.

But even if great critics have not appeared amongst us, that is no adequate explanation for the fact that modern art is something which a large percentage of educated humanity is unable to understand. The man in the street asks for naturalism and representation; the artist gives him abstract compositions, which often resemble nature not at all. The artist is blamed for this situation. It has however been said that each age

gets the art it deserves. Till political and economic coherence come out of incoherence, do we deserve anything different?

One thing is however certain, namely that the revival of some old style will not alone produce a new or a great phase of art. Continuity always has, and no doubt always will, play a very important part in the formation of every style. But sheer revivalism, without creation, is inevitably sterile. We must wait in patience till the storm has passed and the turmoil dies down. Then perhaps a style based on the role of the individual, which is as great as that of classical Greece or the Renaissance, or one based on the suppression of personality in subservience to a greater ideal, which is as impressive as the Romanesque or the Byzantine, may be forthcoming. Which way the wheel will turn or when it will move we do not know. But the great lesson of history is that move sometime it assuredly will. At the moment our art is passing through a phase of change and enquiry. Let us seek to understand and appreciate it in so far as we can, even if at first the effort we must make has to be considerable, and even if, at the end, the emotion we experience is not always wholly one of pure delight or pleasure. But the art of today is just as much a part of the age in which we live as we ourselves, and our lives will surely be made the richer if we give due consideration to it.

## CHAPTER X

### METHODS OF ART STUDY AND ART TEACHING

JUST as there are many different reasons as to why people want to look at pictures and many different reasons why patrons have supported artists, so there have been quite a number of distinct approaches to art on the part of those who have, in the last century or so, paid attention to it. Some, and among them perhaps the most truly appreciative, have accepted art as a normal accompaniment of civilized life and have acted as patrons both in a big and a small way, or have visited museums and galleries or made collections with the same straight-forward approach that the average man has, say, to his garden. Others on the other hand have sought to make of art a field of private reserve, where none but the élite should enter; they have formed narrow cliques and coteries at the universities or in the cities where they live, and have tended to wear distinctive "arty" clothes and adopt a special manner of speech. Such people have usually been termed "æsthetes" and at certain phases in the last eighty years or so they have played quite a prominent, if at times a rather absurd, part in the national life. Their war has been against those who have, for one reason or another, failed to recognize the existence of art, and they have tended to go to extremes in an effort to press home their belief in the importance of art.

Similarly those who have made the actual study of art their special business have also approached the subject in a number of different ways. One may thus distinguish the attitude of the collector, who is primarily concerned with the identification of paintings and their attribution to particular artists, or that of the pure historian of art, whose main interest is in artistic developments as a whole over a given period of time or in

relation to their age. Or again, there is the man who is mainly preoccupied with questions relating to the lives of individual artists ; one might perhaps call him the biographer of art. And more recently a new approach again has appeared on the horizon, that of the anthropologist or student of ethnography, whose enquiries lead him along lines connected with the relationship of art products to the racial, cultural or geographical conditions that pertained at the time and in the place where the art was produced. Some writers have stressed the importance of individuals, regarding art as essentially a personal affair ; others, following the teaching of the dialectical materialists, have neglected the individuals and have sought in art only a reflection of social developments or class struggles at various periods in the world's history. And finally one may differentiate the outlook of the students of æsthetics, who are concerned with the philosophical ideas that lie at the back of the artist's mind, at times even more than with the actual works of art themselves.

Not unnaturally, each of these lines of approach is to some extent symptomatic of an age. The student of material culture, who would seek to explain the nature of Rembrandt's work as the result of the frustration brought about by a narrow bourgeois society, or that of Michelangelo's as due to his privileged position in a feudal aristocracy, is thus a very recent manifestation. Some quite interesting books have been written from this particular standpoint, and the connection between an artist's work and the social conditions of the age that produced him has always been important and often quite clearly marked. As has already been noted, Peter Bruegel's picture of "The Massacre of the Innocents" (Pl. 12) affords a case in point, for though the theme is a purely biblical one, the scene is staged in a Flemish village, the figures wear contemporary Flemish costume and, but for its title, the picture might almost represent the visit of some band of inquisitorial troops to a village suspected of heresy or political disloyalty, rather than a biblical scene ; indeed there is reason to believe that

Bruegel was recording some such actual event when he painted the picture. Or again one can trace the influence of contemporary wars and troubles in some of Dürer's works, notably his woodcut of "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse", in executing which he surely had in mind the famine and destruction caused by the recent wars of successions. Holbein's illustrations to "The Dance of Death" again no doubt reflect the popular attitude towards the several walks of life that are depicted. The monk, who struggles with death in terrified frenzy, or the bishop, who appears incredulous that so mundane and common a thing could touch his august personage, thus contrast markedly with the parish priest, a figure of simple dignity who goes to administer to the last needs of one of his poor congregation (Pl. 16). One is left in no doubt as to the popular affection for the priest and contempt for the monk or the bishop. The whole series of woodcuts, in fact, offers a telling exposition of the social background of the time.

There is much of the greatest value and interest to be learnt in thus linking up art and social history; indeed, a close study of the art of an age often furnishes as clear a picture as do the written documents, and it is a field which the social historian cannot afford to neglect. But from the point of view of art-history this line of approach has in recent years sometimes tended to be over-biassed by political theories which have no connection with art, with the result that the enquirers have become tedious and the conclusions unreliable. In fact a preconceived political notion has sometimes been permitted to prejudice the facts, whereas in a true scientific enquiry, it is only when the facts have been taken into full account that any theory worthy of consideration can be produced.

Similarly, at the opposite extreme, the æsthete was primarily a product of the 'nineties, and the picture of an exquisite young man, gently clasping a lily, and gazing with rapture at a painting of tender delicacy, is associated in one's mind with the drawings of Beardsley,



or in another mood, with the lampoons of Gilbert and Sullivan's "Patience". And the more we learn of art, the more do we come to realize that it is not a narrow preserve where none but the chosen elect may tread; indeed, it is to a great extent thanks to the absurdity of the extremes of the æsthetic movement that the Philistine in the last generation has tended to despise art. In the mediæval world, and even more at the time of the Renaissance, art was something of universal significance, and that is the position that it should assume in any well-balanced and complete society.

Of the more profound methods of approach, that of the connoisseur is perhaps the most important. It is perhaps at first tempting to regard the connoisseur primarily as an outcome of the social conditions of the last century, or anyhow the period before the 1914 war, when the hobby of forming great collections was at its height. His method of approach has in reality constituted the very basis of the science of art study—for in this respect it may well be called a science. A century ago, the attributions of pictures to individual artists were usually of the very vaguest. Little differentiation was made between school pieces and those by the master's own hand; all pictures of a certain type were usually assigned to one man, without taking into account the possibility of followers and imitators; little attention was paid to the differentiation of local schools. Thus practically all the sweeter, more delicate Madonnas painted around 1500 were attributed to Raphael, and practically all landscapes of classical themes treated in a rather romantic way were assigned to Salvator Rosa. Such local schools as those of Ferrara or Bergamo in Italy remained undifferentiated. Ideas as to date were of the vaguest and the style of the mannerists or eclectics of the sixteenth century in Italy was hardly distinguished from that of the great masters of around 1500. But with the arrival on the scene of a few notable scholars, Morelli in Italy and von Bode in Berlin foremost among them, analytical study began, and the clear differentiation of school pieces from those

of the master, the identification of local schools, and the distinction of artists formerly unknown, or entirely disregarded, became a vital facet of the study of art, as did a new exactitude in dating. Further, when names were lacking it often proved possible to collect together a group of pictures obviously all by the same hand, and to give the painter some fictitious name usually suggested by the most important painting of the group; the Master of Moulins who worked in France in the fifteenth century may serve as an example, for now quite a number of paintings can be assigned to the hand of a single individual whose most important work was a lovely altar piece in Moulins Cathedral. One great connoisseur, Bernard Berenson, has indeed gone even further than this, and has tried to build up an actual personality around such an anonymous master, whom he called the Amico di Sandro, the friend of Botticelli.

It was indeed really the connoisseurs who began to set the study of painting on a sure footing as a serious branch of learning in its own right, and their work was carried forward into other realms by other men who based their research to a great extent on the foundations furnished by the connoisseurs. Dates were firmly fixed, so that periods came to be more and more exactly defined, and even if the painter could not be identified, the assignation of a more or less exact date to a work of art became a comparatively easy matter for the expert. Indeed, some of the methods of the connoisseurs were extended to the field of archæology, and the idea of stylistic sequence originally used to determine the progress of an individual painter's work came to be employed in the study of such things as Greek pottery or sculpture. As a result it is now possible to date fragments of Greek vases to periods of ten- or even five-year duration, whereas previously the archæologist would have been slightly vague even as to the century to which they should have been assigned.

In this business of dating, however, some degree of caution is necessary, for at most periods in the history

of art the work of some artists has always been more advanced than that of others. Indeed, unless one knows whether the artist was progressive or conservative, no exact conclusion can be reached; all one can say is that such and such a work belongs to a later stylistic phase; one cannot say that it is necessarily actually later in date also. To take an example from modern times, one can say that a Gauguin of Tahiti, like the famous "Nevermore", belongs to a later phase of his development than one of his French landscapes, which are purely impressionist and akin to the work of Pissarro (Pl. 24). It also obviously belongs to a later phase in art than such a painting as Monet's "Nymphéas" in the Orangerie at Paris. If one could transplant oneself into the position of an art historian of, say, the year 2200, who had no names to guide him, one might legitimately conclude on the basis of this evidence that Gauguin's "Nevermore" was at least fifty years later in date than the Monet. Yet the Gauguin was painted in 1897 and studies for the Monet were begun in 1904. The real difference is that, among progressive artists, one was a more adventurous explorer than the other. And if one considers that artists of a thoroughly conservative trend like Meissonier or even Puvis de Chavannes (1824-98) were working at the same time, it is clear that the factors for error become even more considerable. Sequence dating must, thus, take into account the individuality of the artist, and though in such an art as the Byzantine this had a less important role to play than in an age of personal expression, like the nineteenth century, the factor is still always an essential one. Style is, in fact, not always a thoroughly reliable guide, as to actual date when considered on its own.

The student of art who is primarily historian, though he must of course pay a good deal of attention to problems of authorship, is however perhaps more concerned with problems of a rather different character, for his interest tends to lie not so much in who painted a picture, or to what period of the painter's lifetime it

belongs, as in the phase of development of art as a whole to which it should be assigned, and the place which it should take in that phase. It is in fact with the problem of "period" that he is most concerned. Thus whereas the connoisseur tends to think of "The Sistine Madonna" as one of the most outstanding productions of the later period of Raphael (Pl. 10 (a)), the historian sees the picture as the epitome of the stage of artistic development in Italy reached about 1513, and on the basis of a study of it he would seek to reconstruct a picture of the age to which it belonged. Burkhardt's great book on the Italian Renaissance is one outstanding example of a study of this type. Quite often, in fact, an examination of works of art alone can provide an astonishingly clear picture of an age and all that it stood for; clearer indeed than the picture afforded by the study of documents. The historian who fails to pay attention to art is guilty of neglecting a very valuable source of evidence.

The "ethnological" approach really represents an extension of this method, though here the enquirer is concerned more with the racial basis of the society that produced the art, or the geographical surroundings that nurtured it, than with the historical background. He would argue that the outlook of a particular race, which is clearly differentiated in everyday life, is also differentiated in art. Flemish painting of the later fourteenth or early fifteenth century, for example, is rather more matter-of-fact and solid than French art of the same period, just as the Flemings are a solid and more matter-of-fact people than the French. German art, from the earliest times, shows an attention to detail and a love of rather abstract subjects which was quite unknown to Italy. In the Orthodox Christian world the art of the Slavs is quite distinct from that of the Greeks, though both use identical themes and follow identical models; the Russians, on the one hand, seem to have liked rather rhythmical compositions and angular forms, whereas the Greeks favoured more sculptural draperies and more rounded figures, which carry on

to some extent the sculpturesque tradition of classical times.

There is, no doubt, a great deal of interest and value to be learnt by an analytical study of art on these lines. The subject is however still in its infancy, and though what may be termed a discipline of racial æsthetics may well come to be formulated in the future, but little work has been done on the subject up to now.

The influence of geographical surroundings was no doubt also important, though evidence is to be more readily collected in the field of architecture than in that of painting. It can thus be shown that the nature of buildings, in any case those of traditional style, has been considerably affected both by climatic conditions and by the nature of the materials most readily available. Thus in forest areas the log cabin or its elaborations constitutes the normal building style, while in areas where little timber or little good stone was available some form of arch or dome in brick was usually employed for the roof. These building forms were in many cases evolved at an early date, and they have remained in use with astonishingly little change until present times. The domical huts of northern Mesopotamia afford an excellent example, for they are built today in a form exactly similar to that to be seen on early Assyrian reliefs.

Similar influences were certainly exercised in the realm of art also, though they are harder to discern. Thus in Mesopotamia, where stone was absent, large-scale stone sculpture was obviously precluded. This is one of the principal reasons why the art of Mesopotamia was so distinct from that of Egypt, where supplies of excellent stone were readily available and served to make monumental sculpture one of the most important art forms of the civilization. But in addition to obvious influences of this type it is probable that geographical factors also exercised a more esoteric effect. Thus an art like that of classical Greece, which depended more than anything else on a knowledge of the human form, would have been quite impossible in a northern climate,

where the human body would have been unfamiliar owing to the necessity of wearing thick and elaborate clothes. Or again, it would be hard to associate an introspective, searching art like that of the Celtic world with clement, warm, and bright conditions of weather. The whole spirit of this rather abstract art seems somehow to be in keeping with the cold and dimness of a northern climate rather than with the brilliance and clarity of the Mediterranean world.

The approach to art of the student of æsthetics breaks rather different ground, for he is not primarily concerned with the work of art itself, which forms the main basis of study in the case of the other groups differentiated above, but with the ideas which the artist is seeking to express ; it is not so much the finished art product that concerns him as the ideas that exist in the artist's mind. These ideas, naturally enough, concern the art-historian in so far as they find concrete expression in the artist's work, but they concern the student of æsthetics as pieces of a psychological problem, which may almost be considered in isolation, divorced from the material object or art product itself. The discipline is thus primarily a philosophical rather than an historical one, and æsthetics tends to constitute a specialized subject somewhat apart from the rest of art study. But there are many amateurs and enthusiasts as well as specialists who are attracted by this approach, and its results have much of very great interest to offer. It is however essential to remember that the work of art is, in all art study, the basic essential, and if an enquiry into philosophical ideas divorces the idea from the object, the enquiry automatically ceases to be within the scope of art study proper and enters into that of philosophy or psychology. Indeed a tendency to lose contact with the art product altogether has at times characterized enquiries in the field of æsthetics. For art to be good, some sort of *an* idea is an essential ; but art also has in it the element of craft ; it is something made with the hands as well as conceived in the mind, and it can only be fully appreciated when this dual aspect

is taken into account. The skill and craftsmanship of the artist and the objective character of the work of art are absolute essentials, and without them the result will be null and void, however intriguing, creative or imaginative the idea.

In opposition to this more philosophical line of approach is that of the practical teaching of art itself, where problems of technique, colour, composition and so on are tackled from the point of view of the artist. Until about two hundred years ago there was no such thing as art teaching in the sense that we know it now, that is to say as a subject taught in the schools in order to qualify for the issue of a certificate or for entrance to a university. Nor was there even teaching on a higher level as there is today in numerous art colleges throughout the country, where diplomas or sometimes even degrees are awarded at the close of a course extending over a period of from three to five years. Indeed, the only way in which the practice of art was taught until comparatively recent times was by the apprenticeship method. According to this system, a young man of talent would offer himself to an established painter, and if he was accepted he would work under the master's direction, often for a period of many years. At first, his activities would be limited to the mixing of paints and the preparation of canvases. Then he might be entrusted with the task of painting the draperies or backgrounds. Finally he would perhaps execute some of the details as well. The nature and extent of the work undertaken by the apprentice varied of course very much in accordance with his ability, as well as with the type of picture his master was painting. A promising pupil would be allowed great responsibility at an early stage, while those showing less skill might be kept on hack-work all their lives. A famous picture of the Virgin by Verrocchio, for instance, contains a child St. John which has usually been attributed to Leonardo da Vinci, who worked for a few years as Verrocchio's pupil; the pupil was thus given great freedom at a very early date in his apprenticeship.

Painters like Vermeer or the Van Eycks, who usually worked on a small scale and in a meticulous manner, would employ but few assistants, and their duties would be mainly in the way of mixing paints and preparing the ground. Painters like Rubens or Raphael, working on a large scale and in a broad manner, had numerous pupils and also even actually employed assistants, whose principal task was to transfer the small-scale designs of the master on to the large canvases that were in vogue at the time or on to walls. But the most talented also often did paintings on their own, in the manner of their master, and if they were satisfied with the work many masters, Raphael foremost among them, would make a few deft finishing touches, and would then sign the picture as their own. This is one of the reasons why the paintings attributed on reasonably sure grounds to Rubens, Raphael and certain other painters are so very numerous, and it is only in comparatively recent times that any serious attempt has been made to differentiate between the work of the pupils and that of the great men themselves. Reynolds once said that the work of Raphael in fresco was immeasurably superior to that on a small scale on canvas. The reason for this was, of course, that Reynolds was taking all the canvases of the studio assistants to be by the master, whereas he was accepting as his only the best of the Vatican frescoes on which it was known that Raphael worked himself.

A great many important painters not only learnt their craft in the studios of others, but also continued to work with their masters even when they themselves had become accepted. Such great men as Jordaens, Jan Bruegel and Van Dyck, who had served as apprentices to Rubens, continued to work with him long after they had earned fame for themselves; in his contract for the decoration of the Jesuit Church at Antwerp it was even stipulated that Rubens was to employ no assistant except Van Dyck. Others began under great masters even if they did not stay with them. Giotto worked under Cimabue, Leonardo under Verrocchio, Raphael under Perugino. Indeed, nearly all the great



men of the past had served their apprenticeship under a master of an older generation. Even in the eighteenth century Reynolds was bound as an apprentice to Hudson, while Northcote and others in turn worked under Reynolds.

In this way a marked continuity of style was established, and secrets of technique were handed down from master to pupil, so that they survived through many centuries. Each painter of quality began where his master left off—or in any case, began at the stage his master had reached when he left him. He learnt all sorts of tricks and secrets and, above all, he learnt craftsmanship—how to mix paints, how to prepare the canvas, how to achieve particular effects of light and shade, how to produce a desired illusion, or whatever it might be. And in the case of the minor arts, illumination, ivory carving, metal working and so on, craftsmanship was if possible of even greater importance than in painting, and studio secrets were of outstanding value.

Though Reynolds, as has been noted, still allowed pupils to attend his studio, he actually did not make much effort to teach them; if he wanted help he called in the assistance of a fully trained drapery painter, who could take some of the more arduous work off his hands, with full responsibility, and if he did any teaching, it took the form of official teaching at the Royal Academy, rather than private teaching in his own studio. Indeed, the foundation of the Royal Academy in 1768 marks a new era in the teaching of art in this country, and as similar academies were being founded in the rest of Europe at much the same date, one can count the middle of the century as a turning-point of method all over Europe; such academies as had existed before, like the famous one in St. Martin's Lane in London, which was run first by Thornhill and then by Hogarth, were small affairs, hardly affecting the universal system. The change was from apprenticeship under a chosen master to the system which is in vogue today, namely that of official teaching by a series of professionals whose primary duty it is to teach.

The change was of course gradual, for at first the Royal Academy in London was practically the only centre in Britain. But early in the next century Academies were founded in Edinburgh and Dublin, and other schools and colleges began to spring up, first in London and soon after in the provinces. And just as the rich business men of the Midlands often founded museums or bought and commissioned pictures for the civic buildings of the new towns, so they also sometimes founded art colleges or endowed art schools. All were usually conceived on the model of the Royal Academy schools in London, where various teachers were responsible for different subjects, and where the student followed a more or less set curriculum, and by the last quarter of the century practically every large city boasted such an institution.

Of course many of the old secrets and old ideas were handed on, and new solutions to technical problems were arrived at as material inventions were made. But what distinguished the new system above all was the fact that the teachers were not usually the great men, but were often apt to be drawn from the ranks of those who had failed to make a living as artists. They were no doubt sincere, and were capable so far as it went, but there is a vast difference between working as an assistant in the studio of one of the greatest masters of the day, even if he does little actual teaching, to working in an art college under the direction of a number of different teachers, some at least of whom are perhaps men lacking in originality or in powers of independent invention.

In recent years this drawback has perhaps become less serious than it might have been, for owing to the economic situation it is often impossible for even the very greatest artists to earn a living by painting alone, and they have had to have recourse to teaching in the colleges to support themselves. But the difference of a multiplicity of teachers rather than a single master remains, for the teachers tend to specialize, and a pupil will normally study drawing with one man, still-life

with another, figure painting with a third, composition with a fourth, and so on. As a result, his ideas tend to be divided, and even if each specialist can give more in his own branch than a single master, the general aggregate tends nevertheless to be less coherent, and probably also less inspiring, and the pupil's outlook as a result perhaps tends to become unbalanced and uneven. It may be to some extent for this reason that modern art has developed in a series of jerks rather than smoothly and evenly as it usually did in the past, and it is perhaps also because of this that the younger artists are often lost, and seem to have no very clear idea of what their aims and objectives are. And without clear aims, they not unnaturally produce works which are confused, and are in consequence neglected by the public.

Sometimes this neglect may be merited; at other times, given a period of regular work under the discerning eye of an inspired master or patron, many of the younger men would be capable of doing very great things. But without patronage the economic factor intervenes, for the sales that a younger man can make are likely to be too meagre to support life, and artists are thus forced to turn to teaching in order to survive. The more distinguished among them obtain posts in the art colleges; the less distinguished go to boys' or girls' schools. And in this way a man never really reaches maturity before he becomes a teacher. Surely no system could be better calculated to make for a decline than this? Nor can the colleges do very much good by turning out numerous second-rate professionals. In this modern world much too much stress is laid on professionalism, and the colleges are not really performing an important task when they produce them. They would do better to encourage the serious amateur, and perhaps their most valuable work is being done in the way of helping to increase the numbers of people who are able fully to appreciate quality, and so to raise the standards of taste throughout the country as a whole.

The decay of the competent amateur is, indeed, one

of the sadder aspects of present-day society in many different walks of life, and though it is not perhaps so strongly marked in the sphere of painting as in that of music, the trend is none the less serious in its effect. The sketching clubs and study groups which exist in many towns are thus, in the writer's view, wholly admirable institutions, which are deserving of every kind of encouragement, primarily because of the amateur status of those who constitute their members. Like the private academies of the eighteenth century, they afford facilities which would not otherwise be available—a model, properly lighted interiors, a teacher who can guide when someone is in difficulties, and so on—but there is no set curriculum and above all no examination. A pupil goes there because he wishes. It was just at such places as these that some of the greatest painters of the eighteenth century exercised their abilities, and similar academies played an important role in nineteenth-century France. They were of very great assistance to men who showed signs of unusual talent and who were determined to pursue the career of artists, and they play the same role today by offering facilities to the keen amateur who wishes to draw or paint when time permits. They answer in fact a demand arising from within the world of art; they do not, as do the colleges, offer scholarships and a tempting form of education with the hope, if not the actual prospect, of a job at the end of it.

Another aspect of the study of art that deserves some attention here is that of collections, or rather of their accessibility to the public, for it is only quite recently that the vast mass of the material that is now available for people to look at has been so easily and generally visible. The first public exhibition of paintings to be held in this country was organized by William Hogarth at the Foundling Hospital in 1758. It was followed by similar exhibitions annually, first at the Society of Arts, then at the Spring Gardens; in 1768 the Royal Academy was founded, and though the other shows gradually dropped out of existence, the Academy has

staged one annually ever since. The first one-man show in London was organized by Wilkie in 1812, but it was a failure and it was not till many years after that this important form of exhibiting contemporary art became usual. With the middle of the nineteenth century public exhibitions had become more numerous, though it was hardly until the second half that they assumed a scale in any way comparable to what we know now.

Works which were not by contemporary artists could of course be seen in the private collections, but it was not always by any means easy to obtain access to them, and throughout the eighteenth century there were continual complaints on the part of artists regarding the difficulty of getting into the private houses and of the extortionate tips demanded by the servants when once the owner's permission had been obtained. The first collection of old masters of a public character was not opened until 1824, the year of the formation of the National Gallery in London. Other galleries were opened in many of the big cities as the century proceeded, but most were founded only during the second half of the nineteenth or even during the twentieth century. Today we tend to forget how recent, comparatively speaking, such foundations are. And in these years we are additionally lucky, for today there is hardly a private house of quality or a private collection of any importance which is not open to the public at least on one day during the week.

And if the public opening of collections is something quite new, the problem of teaching the theory and history of art as opposed to its practice is an even more recent development. In its more advanced stages at the universities the subject is termed, for lack of a better word in the English language, art-history, though it embraces a good deal more than a purely historical survey of the subject. In its earlier stages in the schools or in adult education classes, it is usually called art-appreciation. There is a growing demand for facilities to study these subjects, and provision is made for them

in many universities, especially in the provinces. The older universities however still refuse to admit art into any curriculum except that of the classics. It is to be hoped that the futility of studying a period of history without giving attention to the works of art which were produced during that period will before long come to be generally admitted. Similarly, it seems equally wrong to study what the writers in particular countries were writing without also paying attention to what the painters were doing in the same place and at the same time. With regard to many periods of the more distant past, the visual arts constitute practically the only surviving records, and our ideas of the culture of those periods as a whole is derived almost solely from a study of art. Why then, when other records chance to survive, should it be necessary to go to the opposite extreme of disregarding the evidence of art almost entirely and of trying to build up a picture of the civilization solely on the evidence of the written word?

But at some of the younger universities in this country art-history has, in comparatively recent years, come to be recognized, and courses are offered which are intended either to equip potential art-historians of the future, or, more usually, to serve as companion studies to those doing history or some linguistic subject, so that they may learn something of the art of the period whose history they are studying, or of the country whose language they are learning. And further, general courses are also offered which aim at providing at least a background for those whose other work does not permit of much time being devoted to art-history. The students who follow these courses are the potential amateurs of art and as such they constitute a very valuable section of the community.

As to art-appreciation, that is, the study of art by those who are not "professional" students, little need be said, for the very existence of this book testifies to what is being done. Extension lectures are given in practically every city, and in most towns there are art societies or study groups. There are numerous public

collections, and ease of communication has greatly widened the horizon of those who like to look at works of art ; moreover, the Arts Council, with its itinerant exhibitions, has done work of inestimable value. Further, books which are intended for the general reader rather than the specialist appear regularly ; it is almost necessary to insert here an apology for adding yet one more to their number !

## CHAPTER XI

### CONCLUSION

ANY reader who has pursued this book chapters will see that many different reasons may be put forward to account for why we should wish to look at works of art, though not all of them are of a purely æsthetic character. There are also a good many different ways of looking, or rather, a good many different lines of approach. But even if the amateur is first drawn to art for some purely fortuitous reason, such as an interest in the sitter of a portrait, a love for a familiar landscape, or the "message" that the subject may convey, he will in the end come to enjoy the picture primarily for itself, and in conclusion a few words may be said regarding the nature of this enjoyment.

That delightful eighteenth-century writer on architecture, Wootton, once said, "Well building hath three conditions ; Commodity, Firmness and Delight," and one might extend his definition to apply to the admiration and love of art, and say that art has three conditions also—Commodity, which may be more exactly defined as the composition, proportion or balance of a picture ; Firmness, which might be interpreted as strength of purpose, clarity of object and genuineness of intention in the artist ; and Delight, which explains itself, though often enough, the would-be scholar tends to become over serious and to forget delight, just as some who are doubtless truly religious tend to think that Sunday should necessarily be a day of unalleviated gloom. This is not likely to be a fault of the "amateur" ; for he is drawn to art because he likes it. But in this world of today with its muddled and confused complexes one should perhaps include a word of warning ; there is no harm in finding delight in a work of art or in taking simple enjoyment in looking at pictures !



The nature of good composition is harder to explain ; it is a question of balance, arrangement, and competence. Some pictures are obviously awkward ; others tend to be so organized and balanced that they are almost geometric figures. The ideal probably lies somewhere between the two extremes. The more one looks at pictures the more one comes to realize that good composition is something that is not only essential, but also in itself very rewarding. But it cannot be defined. Some writers and painters have asserted that the basis of all good work is the triangle ; others that it is a spiral. In the works of some painters, Rubens for example, the form of composition is the curve and the line is flowing ; in those of others, like Cézanne, the composition is angular and the line severe and limited. It is really a matter of the temperament of the artist and of the nature of the subjects that he selects, for certain themes call for lightness and movement, others for dignity and poise. But one cannot say that an angular basis is necessarily better than a curvilinear one. The only question at stake is whether what the artist produces is good or bad of its kind.

Of Firmness little need be said. Triviality in itself is obvious, and a trivial mind will eventually appear as trivial, even if at first, thanks to an eyewash of superficial competence, the triviality is obscured. But with Firmness of purpose, art will not be trivial, though it may at times be clumsy. Clumsiness is sometimes a pity, but it is far less inimical to good art than triviality, and at times, especially in the works of primitive artists, it has a distinct attraction of its own ; witness a great deal of the sculpture of the Romanesque age, especially that of the smaller churches in out-of-the-way districts. It only becomes tiresome when it is cultivated as pose, as it has been by a few of our artists today, who ape the primitive, though they are themselves highly sophisticated persons.

In addition to Wootton's three conditions, certain other factors which may perhaps help the amateur to distinguish good work may also be noted here. First,

a word may be said with regard to period. A sense of period is important, and it is nice to know, instinctively when a thing was produced. But period is not a keynote to quality. "Art has neither a past nor a future ; art which is, powerless to affirm itself in the present will never come to its own. Greek and Egyptian art do not belong to the past ; they are more alive today than they were yesterday." So wrote Picasso, and there is no disputing his statement.

A great work of art is always great, and it can be appreciated at any age. It is true, I think, to say that if it is great enough it can be appreciated without the aid of any close familiarity with the culture of the age and surroundings in which it was produced, though such knowledge may often stimulate appreciation. This aspect, the importance of the work in and for itself, lies at the basis of a great deal of modern writing on the subject, and the general consensus of opinion holds that the initial factor which assures this permanency of appeal is what we call by the various names of rhythm, form, composition, and so forth. This rhythm, or whatever we may choose to call it, is at the basis of every good work—it is the universal language of great art. But whatever may be said, it is a language which must be learnt. We must become thoroughly familiar with it before it is possible to discern the great and beautiful regardless of context, and however familiar writers and critics may be with this language, the general observer is not always in so favourable a position. He, if he starts from the point of the normal human being, does require to learn this universal language, and, if he wishes to derive full benefit from it, he must acquire not only a smattering of it, but also a detailed knowledge of the grammar. Some are born grammarians ; but the majority can only become so by study, and in art they must study in detail one particular branch of the subject, must learn for themselves what some particular artist or group of artists were seeking, and what practical limitations stood in their way, and must realize without prejudice the degree to which the artist or

group of artists succeeded in their aims. Only with the aid of such research can the grammar be learnt, and in the learning the student should concentrate on works of established merit, for unless he be gifted with unusual discernment and an unusually broad outlook, he may easily lose his sense of proportion and, owing to the enthusiasm which a close acquaintance and detailed study breed, come to regard secondary works as of primary importance. There is no harm in liking, admiring or collecting secondary works—there is often a great deal of good, for not only do they give delight in themselves, but they may also, if properly approached, serve to enlarge our knowledge and appreciation of the primary works and to enhance our general understanding. But the spectator must remember always that they are secondary works; he must retain his standards of judgement, and remember not to be carried away on the wings of undue enthusiasm.

Before the research can begin, however, there arises the question of approach. Each of us, I think, has some particular road of approach which he prefers. Some may thus be especially interested in the techniques of art; others are mainly concerned with what the artists are trying to express. Some revere the subject matter, others the basic form. Some come to the subject from an historical standpoint, others from a psychological one. This diversity of approach is right and natural, though we must always remember that what is an aid to one person is not necessarily an aid to another. All the talk of planes, volumes, masses, significant form or pure art may be the breath of life to some; to others it is almost meaningless. The question of precise dating may to some be the ultimate goal of all study; to others dates matter but little. But this does not detract from the value of either approach, for many roads lead to the goal. What is essential is to pursue one road with vigour and energy when once the start has been made, but also to remember that there are other lines of approach.

In a similar way it is impossible to dictate as to the

class of art which should be held supreme, for this again is a matter of individual taste. Some of us may prefer work which is at basis naturalistic, like that of fifth-century Greece or Renaissance Italy; others choose that which is interpretational, like the Byzantine or some of the most recent; others prefer that which is completely abstract, like the Celtic or the Islamic. It is, however, impossible to say that one of these is better than the other; we can at most say that one of them is the type of art which we personally find the most satisfying. The wise man is prepared to approach all of them, not with the idea of searching for some tag on to which he may hang criticism or his personal ideas, but rather with that of seeing what each of them, in its own way, has to offer him. It is easy enough to find faults—one could jibe even at Chartres if one were put to it—but those jibes would but serve, as all would realize, to point out the smallness of mind of the jiber. They would indicate that he had approached the subject with the intention of decrying, and they would procure for him but little sympathy. Yet this is the very attitude which was at one time held towards Byzantine art, and it is the attitude which very many people assume towards most recent art at the present day. Instead of the censure that they deserve they as often as not receive the applause of the multitude. In art, “Tous les genres sont bons, hors le genre ennuyeux.”

It is essential thus to approach with an open mind, and this for more reasons than one. Not only must we be free from prejudice if we are to benefit to the full, but also in many cases free from any preconceived idea. It is true, I think, to say that a work about which we have formed an opinion before seeing it is never truly appreciated. We are either so convinced of its merits that we cannot see its weaknesses, or we are disappointed by it because it fails to come up to our expectations. This is because the just appreciation of a work of art is to a great extent the affair of feeling rather than of thought; it is a task undertaken by the sub-conscious rather than the conscious mind. It has been said that

a man can gauge the proportions of a room, even if he enter it blindfolded : if it is small and miserable, he experiences claustrophobia ; if it is spacious and well-proportioned, he senses this balance at once, and feels content. The same is undoubtedly true of other works of art, of paintings, sculpture, or objects on a minor scale, but we often dull these precious senses, so marked in primitive peoples, and hinder the workings of the sub-conscious mind by enforcing at the wrong moment a reasoning arrived at with the conscious mind. In attempting to justify or explain by reason our attraction to one particular type of art, we may lose the true appreciation which is sensed, and gain in its stead a justified one, which is often little more than a bottomless pose. Reasoned quibbles or clever philosophies are practically never of value in the first appreciation or in the appraisalment of a work of art, for art is instinctive, wilful, or wayward in its coming, and demands skill, mastery, and competence in its production. It is the poetry of creative observation. It is a force which defies reasoned praise or reasoned abuse.

This decline of the role of the sensed appeal is, however, not to be attributed entirely to the individual. It is rather a fault of the age, for in our highly mechanized society the part played by the senses in everyday life is coming more and more to be set aside. We should combat against this loss with all our might, for it is a grave one, and it is being accomplished not only because of the inventions and resources of the age, which make the senses less and less necessary in everyday life, but also because of the prevalent taste of the age. Taste is not static. It changes from age to age with the development of thought, and it may be defined as the process of selection of good. It is a process which varies almost from year to year, certainly from decade to decade. The taste of this age tends to lay stress on the appeal of thought rather than on that of sensibility, since the art of today is in the main an abstract art. It may be summarily defined as an art which depicts

objects, not as they appear, but as the artist conjures their appearance in his mind.

Thought without doubt plays a very important part in the conception of any given work, and the more abstract that work is in character, the greater is the role of thought. But in the production of any work the artist must always remain a craftsman. He may think the mightiest thoughts and have the most glorious imaginings of his age, but if he be not a craftsman he is powerless to convey them. Without craft his work must fail, and competence in craft is not only a matter of knowledge, but also one of sensibility. We should never forget this when we look at a work of art, however much thought may have gone to its making and however much thought we may give to its understanding. We should begin by "feeling" the work of art and only then go on to the realization of what it means and stands for. As Eric Gill said, it is the artist's business to bowl over the spectator, and the spectator's to be bowled over. In the case of pottery or certain other works we may want to feel the thing actually and physically in order to get the best out of it. In the case of a building, as already noted, we can sense its proportions. But even if we do not need to touch a picture, we can still sense its quality. Our first reaction on looking at a great cathedral is not usually one of admiration of the powers of the builder as a mathematician, though the calculation of the stresses entailed in one fraction of the building would have been a work beyond the powers of most of us. We are moved rather by the general effect of the whole, and as we enter we begin by *feeling* the spaciousness of the building rather than by thinking of it. Only when we have been inside for some minutes do we begin to think out the qualities of balance, the line or the delicacy of the actual workmanship.

In approaching a work of art, sensibility is thus just as much an essential as ordered thought; openness of mind is just as necessary as knowledge. But what of the work itself? What may we first expect to see as

the distinguishing characteristic of a great work of art? To this question some would at once answer, beauty. Yet excellence in art and beauty are not at all the same thing. Beauty is not necessarily art, since the word is equally applicable to a woman or a landscape. No more is art necessarily beautiful. There is nothing beautiful about Othello's jealousy, to use an old illustration, though the portrayal of it may show great artistry. No more is there anything beautiful about one of Rembrandt's pictures of an ox's carcass hanging in a butcher's shop, or about Domenico Ghirlandaio's painting in the Louvre, which shows an old man in the robes of a Florentine senator, hideously afflicted with elephantiasis, in the act of caressing his grandson. Yet all of these are great works of art. Art and beauty thus do not necessarily go together, and it is hence no valid criticism of a work of art to say that it is not beautiful.

It has been repeatedly held against modern art that it is in this respect of beauty that it fails. Epstein's "Rima" in Kensington Gardens, for instance, has been harped upon. People said that it was so hideous that it would frighten the birds! It may not be beautiful, but the birds do not seem to mind, and it is none the less a work of art. And one at least of those who have criticized it to me hates it purely and simply because it is modern. He would in the same breath have praised the Norman tympanum at Fownhope in Herefordshire, where anatomical distortion is carried to a far greater degree.

In a very large number of cases, however, art and beauty do go hand in hand, and it is when this happens that the greatest works are produced. This was the case with Renaissance Italy, and it was above all true of Greece four and five hundred years before Christ. But in Greece degeneration set in, for beauty came to be the sole aim of the artist, and vapid superficial beauty took the place of the inward beauty of thought, conception, and strength.

From this it appears that other factors are more

essential in art than beauty; that art must have strength and vigour, and that it must be able to transfer sensation and power from the creator, the artist, to the spectator. It may use beauty, just as it may use majesty or mysticism or religion to achieve its ends, but beauty *need* not be there, and beauty *must* not be the sole aim. Nor need all of these other features be there, though they often are. Much of the greatest art of the world is thus religious in character, and until the High Renaissance practically all art was religious, but plenty of good work has been produced since and there was much art before that time which can best be described as majestic. Both these groups are to a great extent impersonal, since art is executed in the one case to the glory of God, and in the other to the glory of an emperor, who was as often as not regarded as almost, if not entirely, divine. In art of both these types the name and personality of the artist is suppressed, and it has in fact only been within the last five or six hundred years of the world's history that the personality of the artist has come to play any part whatsoever. The practice of signing a work really begins only when the artist's personal faith comes to mean more to him than does a communal faith in Church or State, and it marks the substitution of individualism for what is virtually slavery. This individualism, this practice of signing, however, from the point of view of the appraisal of the work of art as such, is no more an essential than are beauty or religion or majesty in the narrower sense of the terms, though all of them are very frequent concomitants.

With the exclusion of all these factors, the question may well be put: what then is art? It is a question which has been asked many hundreds of times, and to which many satisfactory answers have been given. Yet none of them is all-embracing, for art, as Croce said, is what everybody knows it to be. It is something that we must—that we can only—learn of as we proceed with its practice or its study. But for the purposes of starting forth with a sure and definite basis on which



to build I will venture to offer yet another definition. "Art is the temporary achievement of escape from that striving after activity or that search of the unknown which every human being knows, but which the artist experiences to a much more acute degree." It is a temporary achievement because in the true artist the desire can never be finally satisfied. The artist must go on striving, and unless he does so, his fate is sealed. He may change his methods or his approach but he must never cease to strive. • That is where the Academic artist so often fails ; his work may be good, even excellent, but he has stopped short at a certain degree of achievement, when he should have pursued the chimera remorselessly through life. But the work of the true artist reaches a height of sublimity inaccessible in every other sphere—except that of religion. "Inscribe in any place the name of God," said Leonardo da Vinci, "and set opposite to it His image. You will see then which will be held in the greater reverence."





PLATE I. A Bison. Altamira, Spain. Paleolithic.

*Photo. B. de la B. de la B.*



Pl. vii 2 17. Head of Amenemhat IV  
British Museum 1801 1762 B.C.  
Pl. vii 2 17. Head of Amenemhat IV  
Berlin Museum c. 1360 B.C.  
Pl. vii 2 17. Head of Amenemhat IV  
Museum c. 1360 B.C.



Pl. vii 2 17. Head of Amenemhat IV  
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Berlin Museum c. 1360 B.C.  
Pl. vii 2 17. Head of Amenemhat IV  
Museum c. 1360 B.C.



PLATE 3 Daphni, Greece, Dome Mosaic, "Christ," c. 1100.  
*Photo. D. Tallot R.C.*



PLATE 4. The Catacomb of Priscilla, Rome. "The Prophecy of Isaiah," Third century.

*Photo. Ballin Brown*

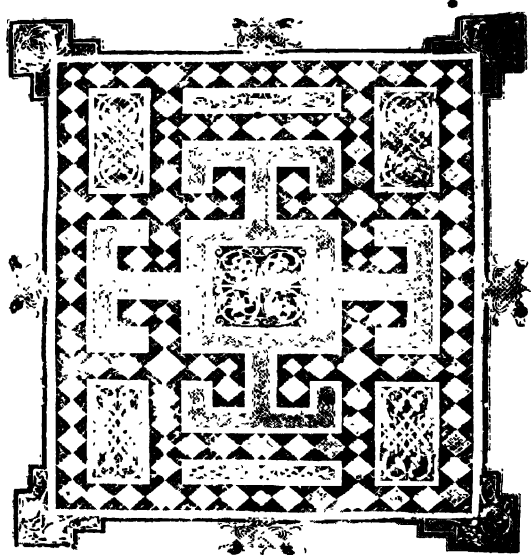


PLATE 5 Page from the "Book of Lindisfarne",  
British Museum, fol. 70v



**D**ominica .i. quadrage  
 stituit me sine.  
 et ego exaudiam tū  
 capiam cum et glo

nificatio cum longitudie  
 dictum adimplebo eum.  
**Q**ui habitat in ad ps.  
 iurono alacrimu in pro

PLATE 6. Page from the "Fres Riches Heures du Duc de Berry" Chateau de Chiny 1410.

Photo. Gernsden





PL. 7  
A

PLATE 7 Duer. A. Hae. Vienna 1502.





PIETER BRUEGEL, "Entombment,"  
Uffizi, Florence, c. 1570  
*photo: Artista*



PIETER BRUEGEL, "Entombment,"  
National Gallery, London, c. 1495  
*photo: Artista*



PLATE 10. Raphael, "The Sistine Madonna," Dresden, c. 1517.

*Photo. M. P.*



PLATE 11. Ingres, "The Vow of Louis XIII.," Paris.

*Photo. G. P. Allen*



PLATE 13 Peter Paul Rubens, "The Rainbow" Landscape. The Wallace Collection, London  
ca. 1635.  
*Prod. Galle.*



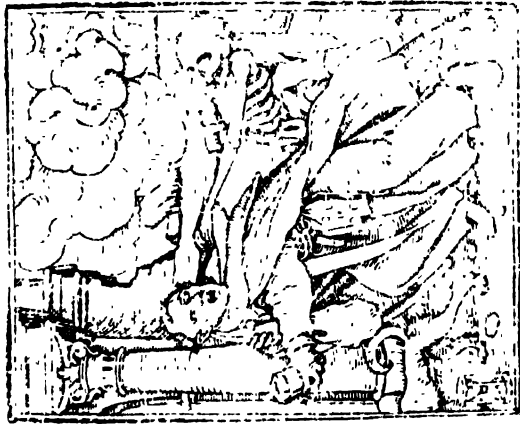
PLATE 14 Velázquez, "Pope Innocent X" (Doria Pamphilj Gallery, Rome, 1650.)

*Photo: Manoll*



PLATE 15 El Greco. "The Assumption" Toledo,  
c. 1600.

Der March.



Der Pfarrerherr.







PLATE 17.—Turner, "Durham Cathedral," National Gallery of Scotland.  
*plate 17.*



PLATE 18 (a) "Life School" Perhaps by Hogarth Royal Academy, London

*Photo Academy*



PLATE 18 (b), Zoffany, "Life School in the Royal Academy" Royal Collections.

*Reproduced by gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen.*



PLATE 19 **Carpeaux** "The Good Samaritan." Glasgow  
Art Gallery. The Burrell Collection.  
*Photo. Gallery.*



PLATE 20 Cézanne. "Portrait of Madame Cézanne,"  
Pellerin Collection.



PLATE 21. Degas "Laundresses" Durand-Ruel Collection



PLATE 22      P. and J. Turner, "Pontoise" (1873)



PLATE 22 *b*      Cézanne, "Pontoise" (1873;  
*B. and J. permission of J. Royal-Ly*)



PLATE 23 Picasso Composition



PLATE 24 *b* - Gauguin. "The Road from  
Pontose to Ozn," 1883



PLATE 24 *a* - Pissarro. "The Road from  
Pontose to Ozn," 1883

*B. 1*